CHAPTER II

MANIPUR AND ITS PEOPLE
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2.1 The Land:

2.1.1 Geographical Profile of Manipur:

Manipur where the present study was conducted, is located along the extreme north eastern border of India. It is literally known as the *City or land of gems*. Geographically, it has an area of 22,356 sq. km. forming 0.7 p.c of the total land surface of the Indian Union. It is situated between the parallels 23º 83’ N - 25º 68’ N and the meridians 93º 03’ E - 94º 78’ E. It has a border of 854 Km of which 352 km. is the international border with Myanmar on the east. The remaining 502 km. long border separates it from the neighbouring States - Nagaland on the north, Assam on the west and Mizoram on the south and the south west (Fig. 3). Physiographically, the land is divisible into a central valley and the surrounding ranges of hills. The valley area is approximately 2,089 sq. km. excluding an area of 550 sq. km. which is occupied by lakes, wetlands, barren-uplands and hillocks. The hills on the other hand, form a major part of the State covering an area of 20,089 sq.km. which is roughly 89 p.c. of the total State area. The hill ranges encircle the valley on all sides with a gentle slope towards the south measuring 798 M a.s.l. at the extreme north and 746 M a.s.l. at the southern end. The eastern Indo-Myanmar border and the western Assam-Manipur border fall between the altitudes varying from 30M to 100M a.s.l. From administrative point of view, the state is again divided into nine districts - four of which are in the valley and the other fives are on the hills (Fig. 3).
2.1.2 **Climatic Conditions**

With varying altitude and its location around the latitudes just north of the Tropic of Cancer, Manipur has subtropical climate in the valley and temperate climate on the hills. Five seasons are distinct in the State viz, Summer, Rainy season, Autumn, Winter and Spring. The maximum temperature varies from 31°C to 39°C during summer and the minimum temperature ranges from 0°C to 4°C during winter (DES, 1985). Annual rainfall is sometimes as low as 975 mm and sometimes as high as 2646 mm. Rate of evaporation in the Imphal valley ranges between 1.8 mm in January and 4 mm in May with average relative humidity varying from 36 p.c to 100 p.c. Beside this, the vegetation of the land has influenced the climatic condition of Manipur.

2.1.3 **The Transport and Communication**

With its river system and mountain ranges in and all around the valley, Manipur has poor transportation and communication system not only for transaction of trade and commerce but also for easy accessibility to health care facilities as compare to other states of the country. Many have commented that the industrial backwardness of the State favouring an additional burden of unemployment among the educated youths are mainly due to inadequate transportation and communication facilities. All sort of surface trade and commercial exchanges take place through only two National Highways (NHs) - one (NH No. 53), connecting Imphal, Jiribam, Silchar and Assam, etc. and the other (NH No. 39), connecting Myanmar, Chandel, Thoubal, Imphal and Senapati with the rest of the country through Nagaland. The seasonal nature of the National Highways and unstable law and order situation further give hindrance to the great mobility of the people within the state and across
the border. Though air transportation exist in Imphal, its international connection has been limited by the innerline permit system since long back. Long standing poor distribution system with political instability in the state has been found to be associated with improper management of human resources opening an avenue for adopting risky life style for the youthful manpower. On other hand, these two National Highways together with the State Highways seems to play a major role for transmission of all kinds of communicable diseases along with the movement of the people for their economic activities. On the existing moral, intellectual and economic status of the people, the influences imparted through picture, magazine, films and recently developed remote sensing audio - visual aids such as Television, has paved the ways on which many a youngsters adopted a strange behaviour risky in all spheres of their life.

2.2 The people:

Manipur assumes an isolated entity not only in its geographical settings but also in peopling by virtue of the land being a buffer zone between the caucasoid-dravidian belt of the west and oriental mongoloid belt of the east. The people of Manipur may be classified as follows according to their ethnicity, origin, religion and amalgamation, etc.

![People of Manipur Diagram](Adopted from Singh & Shyamananda, 1988)
There are four main aboriginal ethnic groups in Manipur such as Meiteis of the valley, Nagas, Kukis and Mizos of the surrounding hills. The Meiteis constitute the largest ethnic group of the State. Again, the Meiteis may be classified into three groups - one who had been proselytised into Hinduism, the second who maintain the traditional religion, Sanamahism (Meiteism) and the third, Bishnupriya group. The ethnic groups of the hills are again sub-divided into 44 tribes who speak different dialects. Twenty nine of such tribal groups have now known as Scheduled Tribes under the constitution of India while the Meitei language speaking population at Sekmai, Andro, Leimaram, Phayeng, etc. have been placed under the Scheduled caste category. The pangals (Manipuris Muslims) are the immigrants in the 17th century AD (Hodson, 1908). The non-Manipuris of Indian origin (Mayang people) and illegal immigrants from Nepal, Bangladesh and Burma (Myanmar) who had been migrated to Manipur have been contributing in part and partial in the making of the present day people of Manipur.

2.2.1 Present Demography:

A total population of 18,26,714 comprising 9,31,511 males and 8,95,203 females are distributed in an area of 22,327 sq. km with an average population density of 82 persons per sq. km (Census, 1991). However, the distribution pattern is very much skewed in the valley as the density records 501 persons per sq.km while it is as low as 49.8 persons per sq.km on the hills. As per census of India, 1991, the sex ratio in Manipur is in favour of males. The skewness in the distribution of the population is also observed between urban and rural areas. Of the total population of Manipur that contributes only 0.2% in the total population of India, about 72% resides in the rural areas as against 74% of the rural India. In the pluralistic ethno-religious complex, scheduled tribes contribute 27.3% of the total
population (Census, 1981). The Hindus outnumber other religious groups having a share of approximately 60% of all the total population. Muslims contribute only 6.99%. The population in Manipur has been rapidly increasing during the last decades. Beside the fertility status of the women, it may perhaps, be due to illegal infiltration of foreigners from Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar etc. with great concern regarding not only imbalance of demographic structure but also in the socio-economy of the State.

2.2.2 Origin and Amalgamation:

The origin of the Meiteis and other tribes are shrouded with many theories. The ethonym Meiteis was originally applied to the Ningthouja Salai (clan-dynasty) which was one of the seven Salais who ruled seven independent principalities in the valley in the early part of the recorded history. McCulloch (1859) and Brown (1874) subscribed to the theory of the Naga-Kuki origin of the Meiteis. Hodson (1908) was also fully convinced of the ultimate homogeneity of the Meiteis with the Nagas and Kukis of the hills. This ethnic homogeneity facilitated the absorption of many tribes into the Meitei social group. It is not unlikely that at different periods of invasions, the tribes have merged themselves with the dominant Meitei community of the Valley (Roy, 1958). This refers some gene flow from various tribal groups to the Meitei population since the historic time.

On the other hand, the Meiteis and the other tribes have been identified with the Kiratas of the Vedic literature (Chatterjee, 1950). However, the theory of Hindu origin of the Meitei had been rejected by many historians. Pemberton (1835) considered them to be the descendants of a Tartar colony from N-W frontier of Chin. The Theory of Tai origin of the Meiteis has been criti-
cised by Hodson (1908) on the ground that the Meiteis are Tibeto-Burman language speakers while the Tais are of Sianese-Chinese linguistic family (Singh and Shyamananda, 1988). G.A Grierson (1923) put forward another theory that the Tibeto-Burman and other Mongolian ethnic groups inhabited the upper courses of the Yangtze and Hoang-ho rivers in China in pre-historic times. Their kinsmen migrated southward and settled in the Hukwang valley of the present land of the Kachin in upper Burma before they moved further down to Manipur valley (Singh and Shyamananda, 1988).

Recorded historical events have proved that Manipur and its people had interaction with different groups of people in Asia and the World over time and space. Various names given to Manipur and its people in the past such as Kathes or Ponnas by the Burmeses (Myanmese), Ilsiao-po-lo-mein by the Chinese, Cassay by the Shans (Tais), Moglai by the Cacharis and Bengalees and Mekele by the Assamese (Kabui, 1988) is the living evidences of human relation in the history of Manipur. In the past, Manipur, being an international trade route was known to the Arabsians, Persians, Roman, Chinese, Burmese, Shans and other oriental countries. Besides, original Mongolian consisting of Shans, Burmese and Chinese etc. who settled in the valley either as war captives or a peaceful immigrants were also absorbed among the aboriginal people of Manipur. However, absorption of people from the rest of India were late.

The Meiteis of today are Tibeto-Burman Mongoloid with Australoid Aryan and Thai admixture and still blended with some Negrito and Dravidian elements. This racial blending is intimately hooked to the evolution of a distinct civilisation in Manipur valley. As Alfred Lyall (1908) described, Manipur valley has been the
cradle of human civilisation and consider it as an *oasis of comparative civilisation amidst the barbarians*. What is important of all these waves of human interaction is the implication for the presence of genetic drift and socio-cultural exchanges characterising the ethnicity over time and again. Biologically speaking, there has been instances of a great deal of suggestions as taken place among the people of this land and that proves against the belief of the people for pure ethnic group.

2.2.3 The Culture and Social Mores of the People:

The Meiteis has their own system of religion with their myths and legends, Gods and Goddesses, rituals and festivals, etc. though it was more or less akin to the faiths on animism of the tribals. They have strong sense of historicity and maintain chronicles and numerous records about their genealogy, society, religion, astrology, charms and mantras, lexicography, medicine, earth sciences, etc. The Chinese record of the second century B.C. by Chang-Kien (Acharyya, 1988) have thrown light on Manipur’s cultural link with China from the time immemorable. The beginning of Manipuri literature may go back to 1500-2000 years from now. The Meiteis are hinduised in the 18th century A.D. (Hodson, 1908). During that time, a cultural onslaught occurred when all the archaic Meitei scriptures were destroyed by king Garibaniwaz at the time of proselytisation of the Meiteis into Bengali Vaishnavism. Since then, the Manipuri culture has become an admixture of Hinduism and old Meitei culture (Sanamahism). In fact, the belief and value system of the Manipuris are largely governed by socio-cultural and religious dictums as acquired from time to time. On the other hand, the tribes of the hills following the British missionaries initiated Baptism in 1894. Later, American Baptist and Roman Catholic missions became active sometimes in 1950s. The Manipuri Mus-
lims (Meitei Pangals) were also settled with their religion in Manipur valley during the 17th century onwards. Meitei language was adopted as their mother tongue and they became an integral socio-religious component of Manipuri population.

Based on the forgoing hints of ethno-religious polymorphic society in Manipur, a brief overview of the general social norms and taboo of the people governing their social life, sexuality, marital affairs, ritual beliefs, food habits, management of mental stress and illness are essential in the present context of study of risk behaviours and diseases related to HIV and AIDS. The social life of Manipuris are governed by the legacy of old tradition and customs rather than the set norms and legal acts. The Manipuri word *Touheide* meaning *Taboo* is a powerful vocabulary used to keep strict discipline in their social life. Nevertheless, development of deviant behaviours is a confirmed human tendency in search of enjoyment and personnel contentment.

Like in other Indian society, pre-marital sexual acts among the Meiteis is strictly prohibited i.e. it is a *Taboo* since long back. Meiteis have had a well developed system of clan exogamy until recently and a less rigid village exogamy which raise the matrimonial distances (Singh, 1978). Theoretically, there is no marriage barrier between different areas of the valley. However, strict prohibition against consanguineous marriage was maintained in the past. Meitei families are patriarchal in structure with wives showing loyalty to their husbands. Nowadays, monogamy is preferred with the abolishment of kingship system of administration and its changes to the modern democratic setups for regulating the social norms. Nevertheless, polygamy was once prevalent in the past with example of one Meitei king married nintysix wives within a short period of three months (Hodson, 1908). Theoretically,
polyandry - a woman having many husbands is hardly known in Meitei society. But, remarriage of widows is socially permitted by observing **Keinakatpa** ceremony. In exceptional cases, if at all existed, for having multiple sexual partners before or after marriage is reported evidently with strict confidentiality in the modern Meitei society. Though prostitution does not exist as a legalised institution in Manipur, its operation has been found in different localities. In present day context, it seems that Meiteis has more freedom of mate selection over a large number of communities with the recent advancement of transport and communication system and speedy urbanisation process.

However, using psychoactive substances on religious occasion and festival was recorded and socially sanctioned even in the past and its legacy is still accepted in the present society. Recently, using intoxicating substances become a popular activity among the youths with the result of abuse and addiction to it.

2.2.4 **Human Resources and Socio-economy:**

In real sense of the term, the total population of Manipur is the human resource with the young ones as the potential future manpower resources. The State is rich in its manpower resource with 42.50% in the age group 0 -14 years, 9.69% in 15 -19 years age group and 11.56% in the age group of 30 -39 years. Though the data between the age group from 20 to 29 years is not available the productively working population is estimated to be 43.20% of the total population (DES, 1985). The state’s economy is predominantly depended on this working group. In a study, the total work force in the age group 15 -59 years of the state has been shown to be 55% of the total population which is a fairly rich manpower resource (Singh and Shyamanada, 1988).
The total number of employment was estimated to be 2.80% in the public sectors and 0.02% in the private sectors of the state showing an extremely narrowed employment avenue in private sector. At present the Government of Manipur and its departments are inundated with more than two lakhs of educated job seekers. With this, the height of corruption has caused an unhealthy environment in the appointment sectors. As a result, hundreds of youths are frustrated and claimed to remain useless without contributing anything in the society. The literacy rate in the state is high as 61% as against the 52% of all India average. This is a great concern and crucial stage reminding the concept of proper management of manpower. Failure to adopt and implement a strategic policy in this regard, the people of Manipur is considered to face a tough time in near future. The initial sign of failure is now manifested as hundreds of youth are indulging in drug menace and still others remain in the crossroads of uncertain future. Thus, a severe damage of manpower resources is observed in Manipur.

The rampant use of unfair means in the examination and false employment in various sectors (Singh and Shyamanada, 1988) is also found to be associated with the widespread drug abuse among the teenagers and the youths specially in the age group from 15 to 39 years. This is also a great threat to the potential energy pool of human population (NICED, 1990). Drug abuse was found more common to the urban youths of Meiteis and Tribals. About 66.4% of the drug addicts were found to be in the higher secondary level of education (IMA, 1983).

What is worrying most is the irreparable lost due to HIV infection among the youthful manpower resources of the State. According to a report of WHO and NACO the estimated number of HIV infection among adult population in Manipur by the end of 1994 would be between 35,127 to 94,995. The
State AIDS cell (1996) has reported 85% of the total HIV positive youths and adolescents belong in the age group from 11 to 30 years. These are the ample examples for manpower resource damage resulting a severe impact in the State's economy and cause mental restless among the people of Manipur. With their uncertain future culminated with all sort of activities, many of the youths has fallen into as victim of drug menace and HIV epidemic. The actual cost of HIV/AIDS treatment, prevention and together with manpower labour are also additional burden to hundreds of affected family and the society as a whole.

Manipur is the most backward State in its economy with 60% of the State population are below the poverty line as against the 48.4% of all India average as observed by the end of fifth plan period (Singh and Shyamanada, 1988). It is also proved that the per capita state income of Manipur is smaller as against the all India level at current price for 1990-91 (DES, 1990-91).

Lack of irrigation facilities, industrial backwardness, poor transport facilities, etc. and lack of skills in the manpower planning are all the determining factors for the poor economy in the State. Over the last few decades, the mobilization of economy and generating of a sound manpower planning programme in Manipur has been far less to the desired goal.

2.2.5 Biology of the People:

Associated with the socio-economic activities and religio-political patronage among the aboriginal people over the years, the ever changing culture and customs of the Manipuris has given an impact on the biological variability of the people. This is primarily caused by the inbreeding mechanism between or among the interacting individuals of different or same community with the occasion of marriage or its other substitutes. Prof. K.S. Singh (1978) has also reported that the Meitei
population is found to largely satisfy the conditions of a breeding population - an ideal unit of genetical evolution. Though biological variation in responding to many of the diseases is a matter of generation after generation, the present physical features and genetic make-up of the people along with their health and diseases as well as their food and food habit may be reviewed as follows.

**Sometoscopic and Genetic Traits**: Despite the great diversity among the Meiteis and the hill men so as to say Tribes, the general facial and sometoscopic characteristics are of Mongolian type (Brown, 1874, Hodson, 1908). But the Bishnupria Manipuris of Khangabok (Singh, 1978), Heirok, Ningthoukhong and the Pangals (Muslims) of Lilong, Komlakhong, Kwajta, etc. have on the other hand, shown generally tall stature, leptosporopic (long) face, messorrhine nose, dolichomesocephalic (high) head forms. So far, study on the general body constitution and its association with the susceptibility of diseases like leprosy, TB, HIV and AIDS, etc. has not been attempted among the Meiteis as well as other Manipuris though sporadic studies on anthropometric measurements have been reported in the State.

Genetically, in the frequency distribution of "ABO" blood group alleles, the Meiteis has shown "A" group alleles in higher frequencies. In another survey, Paite were also shown to posses higher "A" gene frequency while "O" gene was frequently found among the Hmar and the Kuki of southern Manipur. But the Muslims and Kabui have shown highest "O" group alleles. The lowest frequency of "AB" blood group alleles among the Muslims and highest among the Kabui may also be noted (Singh, 1993). Though the present day Manipuris both tribals of the hills and non-tribal Meiteis of the plain have definite mongoloid characters, their genetic connection whether distant or recent with the pure mongoloid stock of
China or Burma (Myanmar) have not been properly studied. For more scientific and clearer explanation of the ethnicity, attention of the geneticists is needed (Yaima Singh, 1989). The anthropometric data is, however, too scanty to give a complete and overall picture of both the Meiteis and the Tribals. Distribution of blood group alleles and its association to diseases has also not been attempted yet among the people.

**Health and Diseases**: Physical illness and mental stress implies the health and disease condition of a person. It affects the well-being of the individual and the family which indirectly refers to the concepts of community health. Exposure to any deviant or risky behaviours whether it may be in the past or present, might lead to unhealthy circumstances expressing in the form of disease among the mankind. Therefore, looking for a remedy to ventilate the trouble and remove the causes of illnesses has been the man's nature since time immemorable and so does the Meiteis and other tribes in their own ways and settings.

At one time, illness was believed to be due to evil spirits. For this, treatment was done by way of offering oblation to please the evil spirit. Still now using of herbs and mantras (rituals) are found practising among the uneducated rural masses of Manipur where access to modern medical care and services are not available. However, with the advancement of medical sciences, the old ways of treatment and management of illness were substituted by the therapeutic intervention with allopathic medicines especially among the urban elites and educated people. However, the State Government were not able to extent equally the modern health care facilities to its 18 lakhs of population which remain inhabited in the nine districts including the most remote areas with poor transportation facilities.
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On the other hand, the geographical situation coupling with its climatic condition and vegetation favour the propagation of the tropical diseases in Manipur. During 1986 - 87, the prevalence of tuberculosis (TB) was reported to be 2% (Singh and Shyamananda, 1988). However, in another study, the number of pulmonary TB was found increasing to 87% in the year 1993 (Singh, et al, 1994). The presence of Japanese Encephalitis in Manipur was also reported in 1982 with a case fatality rate of 53% (Singh, 1995). Leprosy, Malaria and Enteric diseases are also claimed to be endemic in the State.

Recent development in the promiscuity of sex with wider area of mate selection and breaking the customary laws of taboo among the youths is a matter of concern regarding the spread of communicable diseases like STD (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) and other X or Y linked genetic anomalies. It is again an added risk that the recently discovered AIDS virus has found its way into the general masses through unsafe sex with infected persons though it has been detected most frequently among the injecting drug use population of Manipur.

Food and Food Habit: The type of food and food habit is by and large closely related to the evolving religion and ever changing belief system over time and again. Accordingly, human being behaves to form a specific pattern of behaviours which is an important component for the young ones in the society to enter into the mechanism of socialisation process. At certain point of time in the history of Manipur, the aboriginal people both Meiteis and Tribals had a school of faith on animism (Hodson, 1908). In association with this belief system, the food habit of the Meiteis and Tribals were found almost similar, they ate meat, used ardent spirit and tobacco. Rice was commonly consumed as their staple food. In a way, the people may be defined as non-vegetarians in the remote past.
With the advent of Hinduism, the Meiteis and Tribal people were dichotomised into two groups regarding their food habit in the 18th century A.D. along with the Hindu concept of purity and impurity. Those who had converted to Hinduism were consider as pure caste and adopted vegetarian diet, and those who did not, as impure caste and remained as non-vegetarians. The faith and belief system of Meiteis and their food habit had been changed gradually over a period of time. Eating meat was forbidden, using alcohol/spirits and tobacco was prohibited, milk was allowed to consume with the worship of cow. But McCullock stated the relaxation for the minors that children upto the age of 10 to 12 years were allowed to eat everything which was forbidden for an adult. Children were not prohibited even from eating ants and grasshopper (Hodson, 1908).

Meiteis - both males and females at all ages used Pan supares (Beetal nut) and Tobacco. However, opium was not used by the Hindu part of the population, neither was there any consumption whatever of the Indian hemp or other intoxicating drugs. But evidence of growing opium as an agricultural crop was reported (Hodson, 1908). Though cigarette smoking even among the best intellects in the Court (Chirap) was considered in the recent past as a matter of pride, vehement protest came from among the orthodox converted Hindus who were once elicited a formal condemnation of the habit from the wise men of the Chirap (Hodson, 1908). However, using psychoactive substances on religious occasions and festivals was recorded and socially sanctioned even in the past and its legacy is still transduced in the present society.

Two meals per day food habit - one early in the morning at about 9 to 10 a.m. and other, in evening at about 7 to 8 p.m. is still adopting among the general populace. However, with the influences of modern education on science and
technology, the urban elites have started using three meals per day with the addition of breakfast in the morning. Recently, rampant usage of intoxicating substances among the students and youths were also found as an associated food habit with dire consequences of chronic abuse and addiction.