CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Manipur may be regarded as the last born child in the history of bronzes. The term bronzes is used by the modern scholars as nomenclature colloquially as bronzes (alloy of copper and tin in which the main alloying element is tin) to denote the icon or idol and images made of this alloy.

At first the worshipping of idols in religion was not known. On the very outset the religion of Manipur was Animism and then followed by priesthood cult subject to the addition of ancestral worship, Python cult, a counter part of Dragon cult of China. Manipur is the gateway through the South East Asian countries and back to the Afghanistan since the second century B.C.\(^1\). In the 8th century A. D. after Chao - Meng Wang Ko - Lo - Feng the routes from South-East Asia to India had constructed up to the boundary of Magadha through the valley of Manipur\(^2\) or vice versa to India. Hence the cultural theme of Manipur was very complex. Homogenous and heterogeneous cultures flew in the valley of Manipur and absorbed each other. The Brahmins from the west of Manipur and its neighbouring states had influenced for the adoption of Hinduism among the Manipuries (valley people of Manipur).

2. Dr. P. Gogoi : The Tai and Tai Kingdoms, Guahati. 1968, p. 72-3.
With the adoption of Hinduism as state religion, the worship of idol has been started among the Manipuries.

The import of the bronze idols into Manipur was started since the time of Meitei King Kiyamba (1467 - 1508 A.D.) through the Hindu Brahmin immigrants. The concept of public idol worship was not prevalent but confined to some residential home only. So the concept among the ancient Manipuri society had evolved since the Lai - Haraoba, the annual marry making festival.

The Manipuries had begun to worship Lord Vishnu, the Hindu God in the public during the regime of Meitei Lord king Kiyamba. Consequent upon the adoption of Hinduism the worship of Hindu gods and goddesses were seen among the Manipuries. They began to worship the Divine Kalika, the greatest Tantric goddess in 1706 A.D. and Hanuman, the genius of Ramayana in 1729 A.D. respectively. Hinduism was also fostered vigorously by king Bhagyachandra (1763- 98 A.D.). Besides, there are evidences of worshipping the idol of Buddha in Manipur. Thus Hinduism paved the way for the worship of various idols.

This study will serve in the same way as the present social study does for the welfare of mankind. The idols open up new vistas of yesters activity gives varied historical evolution of human arts in Manipur. Bronze craft inspite of its significant contribution of Indian art movement, give
rise a complementary role in setting pace to the development of stylist in sculptural art. Idols of deities made of metal alloy - bronze and octoalloy were in great demand among the followers of the religious sects all over the country.

Comparing to the other media, bronze had some definite points of advantage in attracting the mind of the users. A stone image generally heavy and immobile needs a temple for some such establishment for installation and regular worship. Only an affluent or a royal patron can afford it. Whereas a bronze statue with its small size is much lighter and easily portable. It is suitable for personal possession and private worship as one’s Istadevata by a devotee for any station. It costs lesser than stone images, it required less time and labour in its production. Besides durability, natural for any metal piece, the bronze image exhibits plasticity and charming of form because it is originally model in wax or clay.

In-depth study of the regional art trends in different parts of the country is considered essential for reconstruction of the history of Indian art and preparation of a comprehensive account covering its varied facets. Hence the writer has selected this topic of this state to investigate the art trends and techniques of the bronze images and trace their relationship with other bronzes of the neighbouring states. The study of the bronzes of Manipur will enable us to share in the History of Indian bronzes.
The scope dealing in this study is to confine to the bronze images found in Manipur valley covering from 17th -19th centuries A.D. The study goes to private possessions and Museums. Most of the private idols were at present worshipping in the respective temples of the Brahmmins community.

In Manipur none has so far attempted to study the images of bronzes. But Chitharol Kumbaba\textsuperscript{2}, the Royal chronicle provides some clues to the prevailing metal casting, import of metal images of this state. However, the sculptures of Manipur\textsuperscript{4}, Bulletin of Mutua Museum’s publication highlights some of the sculptures of Manipur.

But for other states of India, Sivaramurti, C. studied “Mode of casting Indian Bronzes”\textsuperscript{5} giving a brief survey of casting images in metal in India and the chief characteristics of sculptures of metal from different areas at different period. He further studied “South Indian Bronzes”\textsuperscript{6} demonstrating a broad based classification of several styles and an authentic method of determining their reasonable chronology. Berrett, Douglas examined “Bronzes from North India and Western Pakistan”\textsuperscript{7} and describes a group of bronzes both Buddhist and Brahmminical belonging to the period of 8th -11th Century A.D. He further

\begin{itemize}
\item[3.] Ibuunghal & Khelchandra : Cheitharol Kumbaba, Manipur Sahitya Parisad, Imphal, 1989.
\item[4.] Bulletin No.2 M.M. Publication : Sculptures of Manipur, Imphal, 1982.
\item[6.] Sivaramurti, C: 1ndian Bronzes, New Delhi, Lalit Kala, 1963.
\item[7.] Berrett, Dougal: Bronzes from North West India and Western Pakistan, Lalit Kala N. 11, 1962.
\end{itemize}
studied "A group of bronzes from the Deccan"\(^8\) and describes ten bronzes of Rastrakuta (9\(^{th}\) Century A.D.) comprising icons of Buddhist, Brahminical and Jain. Gangoly, O.C. also studied "South Indian Bronzes"\(^9\) based on original sources.

Debala Mitra in her book "Bronzes from Bangladesh"\(^{10}\) describe the Buddhist images of 9\(^{th}\) - 12\(^{th}\) centuries A.D. from the distinctive local school of art. Further in her another book "Bronzes from Achutrajpur, Orrisa"\(^{11}\) studies about the hoard of metal antiquities from Achutrajpur consisting of mostly of Buddhist affiliation, female figures, metal stupas and other objects comprising from 9\(^{th}\) - 12\(^{th}\) century A.D. showing Achutrajpur was an important center of Buddhism. "East Indian Bronzes"\(^{12}\) edited by Sisir Kumar Mitra presents the first comprehensive study in style, radiation of style, techniques etc. of the metal icons found in West Bengal, Bihar, Bangladesh and adjacent regions between C. 750 to 1200 A.D. when the Palas and Senas ruled the most part of the region.

R.D. Choudhuri describes the seventy five collective metal sculptures comprising of deities of Buddhism, Saivism and Vaisnavism which belongs to C. 8\(^{th}\) - 9\(^{th}\) century A.D. in the Bulletin "Catalogue of Metal

Sculptures in the Assam statee Museum\textsuperscript{13}.

Chakravarti, S.N. observed "Bronzes"\textsuperscript{14} from Prince of Wales Museum and describes various schools in the collection of the Museum. Thapar, D.R. stress an introduction to Indian images in his "Icons in Bronze"\textsuperscript{15} and gives a popular introduction to Indian metal images. Shere, S.A. studied "Metal images, from Nalanda"\textsuperscript{16} Catalogue of Buddhist sculptures in Patna Museum describing a collection of 13 images from Nalanda.

**Geographical features of Manipur**

Manipur the Nnorth-eastern border state of Indian union embraces an area of 22,356 km. extends from 23° 50'N and 25° 41'N latitudes and 93°2'E to 94° 47'E longitudes having nine -tenth in hilly areas and only an area of 1843 sq. km. is the valley. There are nine districts in this state, namely (1) Imphal East district, (2) Imphal West district, (3) Thoubal district, (4) Bishnupur district, (5) Ukhrul district, (6) Chandel district, (7) Senapati district, (8) Tamenglong district, and (9) Churachandpur district. The first four districts are in the valley while the rest are in the hills.

\textsuperscript{14} Chakravarti, S.N. : Bronzes - A guide to the Antiquities of the Historic Period Bombay, Prince of Wales Museum.
\textsuperscript{15} Thaper, D.R. : Icons in Bronze; an introduction to Indian metal images, Bombay, Asia, 1961 XIX 171 p.
Manipur occupies a frontier position of India, being bordered by Nagaland in the north, Burma in the east, Mizoram and Chin Hills of Burma in the south and the Cachhar district of Assam in the west. It is predominantly a mountainous state but in its central part lies a small alluvial plain—the Imphal valley composed of alluvial deposits with argillaceous of rocks of Disang series as basement rocks. The greater part of the western side is formed of Eocene sand-stone, slates and sales. The rest of the hills surrounding the Imphal valley have argillaceous rocks yielding enormous alluvium that fills the valley. Pure calcareous rocks also occur in the east, lateritic towards the south at Moreh. In and around Ukhrul brine wells and springs indicative of former marine foundations are found. The western hills of Manipur comprises the Koubru, Laimaton, Makui Longdi, Kala Naga and Vangai ranges which are the southern branches of the great Barail, while the eastern hills comprising the Sirohi, Mapithel and Yamdung ranges are the branches of Patkoi mountain of Indo-Burma border. The important mountain peaks are the Mt. Essau or Tenupu. Sirohi in the east and Koubru peak in the west.17

Manipur has a large number of rivers, which flows from north to south except the Leimatak. The biggest and longest river is the Barak, starting from the northern hills flow into the western and southern hills and falls to the Surma valley of Bangladesh via Cachhar. Other impor-

---

tant rivers are the Imphal, the Irl, the Thoubal, the Nambol river which runs across the valley and makes the valley fertile. Among the lakes, the Loktak is the biggest fresh lake.

In ancient days, Manipur had a beautiful widely spread network of land routes through both the plains and the mountains. The important connecting routes were (i) Manipur with Surma valley. (ii) The Brahmaputra valley, (iii) Kabo valley of Burma. The eastern routes were the Heirok route, Aimon and Maring route. Western routes were Tongjeimaril, Ngaprun Chingjin and Akui route. In ancient times the people from the rest of India frequently visited Manipur valley through one of these passages.

There was a regular trade route by land from China via Manipur via upper India to Afghanistan and thence to Europe. Bagchi, P.C. in his book “India and China” also remarks that Chinese pilgrim Huan Tsang referred the existence of a land route to China via Manipur and Assam. Phayre S.A. describes this land route in his book, History of Burma as follows -The route by which Kshetriya princes arrived (in Burma) is indicated in the tradition as being through Manipur which lies within the basin of Irrawaddy. Further the existence of such routes in the second century B.C. has confirmed by Pelliot, who says, “there was a regular trade by land between India and China through upper

Burma and Yunan\textsuperscript{20}.

The Assam - Burma route to China started from Pataliputra (Patna) which was the ancient capital of India, passed through Champa (Bhogalpur), Kajangala (Rajmahal) and Pundravardana (North Bengal) and proceeded upto Kamrupa (Gauhati) in Assam, from Assam there were three routes to Burma in early times - one through the valley of the Brahmaputra upto Patkoi range then to upper Burma, the second was through Manipur upto the Chindwin valley, and the third one was through the Arakan upto the Irrawaddy valley. Again these routes met on the frontier of Burma near Bhamo and then proceeded over the mountains across the river valleys to Yunan Fu, i.e. Kameng, which was the important city of the southern province of China. The Indian caravan used to carry commodities from south western China through this route upto Bactrian (Northern India) in the second century B.C. It is also likely that the Buddhist monks spread Buddhism to south China by this route in the early centuries of the Christian era\textsuperscript{21}.

Various ethnic groups of people such as the Indo-Aryans, the Tibeto Burmans, southern Mongoloid groups, the Tai (Shans) came to Manipur through these routes. Since pre-historic time, the present ethnic groups and communities are the descendants of those people. Many advanced technology and materials reached Manipur through these routes.

\textsuperscript{20} Pelliot, Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise 1, 1904, pp. 142-3.
\textsuperscript{21} Bagchi, P.C.: op. cit, p. 17.
As per 1991 census, the population of Manipur is 18,37,149 having three major groups, the Meiteis of the valley, the Nagas and Kuki-Chins of the surrounding hills and other lesser population of Indian communities. The population of the hills is 36% while that of the valley is 64%. The Meitei ethnic group comprised by 7 clans as Ningthouja, Khuman, Luwang, Moirang, Angom, Kha-Nganba and Sarang-Leishangthem. The Naga tribes are the Tangkhul, Zemi, Liangmei, Rongmei (Zeliangrong) including Puimei, Mao, Maram, Maring, Anal, Moyon, Monsang, Lamgang, Chothe, Koireng, Chiru who are all Tibeto Burma speakers. The Kuki tribes are the Thadou, Paite, Hmar, Vaiphei, Gangte, Zou, Biete, and Mizos.

Manipur enjoys a subtropical monsoon climate by virtue of its position, which belongs to the temperate rainy climatic region, with dry winters and hot summer. Rainfall is relatively abundant and widespread in the state. The natural vegetation in Manipur consists mainly of forest, which play an important role in the regional ecology and economy. The forest in the state cover an area of 15,154 sq. km. which forms two-third of her total geographical area.

The hills of Manipur are covered by mixed types of forest which are poor in quality as well as accessibility. The forest in the west is thicker than the east. The flora of Manipur resembles that flora of the Assam hills. Among the flora of Manipur, the most distinguished is the famous Sirohi Lilly (Lilium Macklenia) found in the Sirohi hills of Ukhrul.
District.

Manipur has a unique name in respect of the global faunal species because of the famous Brow-Antlered Deer (Sangai) found at Keibul Lamjao. Mention may be made of other faunas are the Black bear, Sloth bear, wild pigs, Porcupines, nodes etc.

Methods and Techniques

With the advancement of modern technology, the intensity of interaction between man and society has become more and more reactionary. Hence the study of metals (Bronze images) in the state has an imperative necessity to investigate other facets of human activities. Under such compelling circumstances a detail investigation in the form of personal survey had been taken up. Through the survey, selection of images from the common groups, which belongs to private individuals, were studied and took photograph. The images from the Manipur state Museum Imphal; Mutua Museum, Imphal; Peoples’ Museum, Kakching; Manipur University Museum were included for the study. In studying the art forms and techniques, related published journals and books were consulted.