Every human society develops institutions for the fulfilment of diverse needs and for the realisation of various aspirations. In fact, the smooth functioning of a society depends upon the sound health of the institutions. An institution is the child of circumstances. It is born under certain conditions. It grows with time; it faces challenges and struggles for its survival. Hence it may be said that the study of the social institutions is the sine qua non for the understanding of the socio-cultural life of a people.

The present thesis is a study of the social institutions of the Meiteis. An attempt is made to trace the origin and growth of the institutions by following the high-roads and by-lanes of history. Within the ambit of our study we bring in all those institutions, within which the life-cycle of the Meitei people revolves. Starting with a brief introduction about Manipur and her people in Chapter I, the present work outlines the growth and development of the Meitei society in Chapter II, and studies the social, political, economic, cultural and religious institutions (Chapters III, IV, V and VI). In Chapter VII, we study the changes coming to the institutions under observation brought about
by the impact of British occupation of Manipur in 1891 and the political merger of Manipur into the Union of India in 1949. The last chapter renders a summary and draws conclusion.

The method followed in this research work is historical, analytical and critical. Every attempt is made to draw upon primary sources, derived from old Meitei manuscripts, royal proclamations, official documents and inscriptions, while at the same time the materials included in literature, cited in the footnotes and bibliography, were also taken into account. The materials were collected mainly from the Secretariat Library, Government of Manipur; District Library, Imphal; the private collections of Shri N. Khelchandra Singh, Uripok, Imphal; the National Library, Calcutta, and the Gauhati University Library.

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