Chapter I

Introduction

The Land and People

Manipur: Location and Boundary :

The erstwhile kingdom of Manipur, now a state of India, is situated on the north-eastern boundary of India bordering Burma. Manipur is a hill-girt state. But unlike its neighbouring state of Nagaland, it has an oval-shaped, fertile and picturesque valley called the Manipur Valley. The valley is surrounded on all sides by rings of mountain ranges. Manipur is regarded as one of the beauty spots on the earth and rightly called "The jewel of India." It is scenic beauty is nature's masterpiece and is variously described as "The flower on lofty heights" and "a little paradise on earth."

Manipur is a small state with an area of 22,356 square kilometres. But its merit does not lie in its size and population but in its age-old remarkable distinct culture and civilisation. The valley, though very small in size, is culturally and politically the most valuable portion of the state since time immemorial. Imphal, the capital of Manipur is situated in the middle of this valley.

The present Manipur is bounded on the north by the state of Nagaland, on the west by the Cachar district of Assam, on the south-west by the Union Territory of Mizoram. Its eastern frontier is bounded by the Chindwin district of Upper Burma and the south-east by the Chin hills of Burma. Its boundary with Burma is very long and forms a part of the international boundary between India and Burma.

Though the Manipur of today is a small state of the Union of India, in the days when Manipur was powerful and independent under its sovereigns, she extended her territory far beyond its present boundary. In the east, Manipur extended its territory beyond the Ningthi or Chindwin river. For several centuries until the year 1834 A.D., the river Chindwin was an international river running through Manipur and Burma. According to Pemberton, "The territories of Manipur have fluctuated at various times with the fortunes of their princes, frequently extending for three or four days' journey east beyond the Ningthi or Khyendwin."  

Sir James Johnstone also subscribes to the same view, "The territories of Manipur varied according to the mettle of its rulers. Sometimes they held a considerable territory east of the Chindwin river in subjectation, at other times only the Kubo Valley, a strip of territory, inhabited, not by the Burmese, but by the Shans, and lying between Manipur proper and the Chindwin. Again they were driven back into Manipur proper. For the greater part

of the last century, the Kubo Valley unquestionably belonged to Manipur, and it was never in any sense a Burmese province, being, when not under Manipur, a feudatory of the great Shan Kingdom of Pong.\(^4\) At the termination of the first Anglo-Burmese War, the British permitted Raja Gambhir Singh to retain possession of the valley as a part of ancient Manipur.\(^5\)

When the valley was handed over to Burma, the British Government directed its resident in Ava to announce before the king that the "Supreme Government still adheres to the opinion that the Ningthi formed the proper boundary between Ava and Manipur, but that in consideration for His Majesty's feelings and wishes and in the spirits of amity and good-will subsisting between the two countries, the Supreme Government consents to the restoration of the Kubo Valley to Ava and to the establishment of boundary line at the foot of the Yoma-Doung Hills."\(^6\) Manipur was compensated Rs 6000/- per annum for the loss of the territory.

In the north-east according to J. Roy, it extended upto the kingdoms of Hidimbapur and Moran respectively.\(^7\) Sir James Johnstone who had a fair knowledge about Manipur and Naga Hills says, "There is every reason to believe that the Manipuris in former days did penetrate into the Naga Hills.

\(4\) Johnstone, James, My Experiences in Manipur and Naga Hills, London, 1896, p. 81.


\(6\) Mackenzie, Alexander, North-east Frontier of Bengal, Calcutta, 1884, p. 182.

\(7\) Roy, op. cit., p. 2. (But J. Roy's view seems to be legendary rather than historical facts. So far, no historical evidence is found to substantiate the claim.)
and exacted tribute when they felt strong enough to do so. All the villages have Manipuri names in addition to their own." Even as late as 1832-33 Raja Gambhir Singh subjugated many Naga villages including Kohima and exacted annual tributes from them. Documents show that in 1835 the forest between Doyang and Dhunsiri was declared to be the boundary between Manipur and Assam.

In the west, the territories of Manipur have extended to the plains of Cachar. Even before the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26) Raja Gambhir Singh and his brothers ruled over the whole of southern Cachar and Hailakandi. By the Treaty of 1833, Gambhir Singh removed his Thana from Chandrapur and established it on the eastern bank of the Jiri river. The southern boundary was very irregular and ill-defined and it is not known how far Manipur had extended her territory in this direction. But according to J. Roy, it extended up to the sea.

Physical Features:

Physically, Manipur is divided into two main parts—the valley of Manipur and the hill tracts encircling

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9. Political proceedings, 11th February 1835, No. 90.
11. Ibid., p. 196.
the valley. The hill tracts form about nine-tenths of the total area of the state, while the remaining portion forms the central valley. The hill ranges of Manipur are higher in the north and become steadily decreasing in height as they proceed to the south. These ranges attain their greatest height in the extreme north of Manipur as much as 3000 metres above the sea, but in the south they gradually decrease the height. The hills of Manipur run as a rule in irregular serrated ridge, rising here and there into peaks but in the west of the valley they assume a more open and rolling character.

The surrounding mountains are in most instances covered with the noblest varieties of forest trees, common to both tropical and colder climates. These evergreen forests are decorated by a number of bright and sparkling rivers running through the deep rocky gorges, the principal of which are the Barāk, the Irang, the Makru and the Lokchāo. The Barāk is the biggest river in Manipur. It rises from the northern hills of Manipur and flows through the Cachar district of Assam and finally falls into the Brahmaputra. All the other rivers mentioned above are the branches of the Barāk except the Lokchāo and they are too insignificant to be mentioned.

The scenery of the encircling hills, decorated by evergreen forest trees and long sparkling rivers and streams running through it, indeed, very much enchanting. So
enchanting was it that Sir James Johnstone describes it, "I know nothing more lovely in the world than some of the forest scenery of Manipur with its solemn stillness."^14

The valley of Manipur, situated in the middle of the hill tracts that encircles it on all directions, is oval-shaped with irregular outlines and consists of about 1920 square kilometres of fertile alluvial plains. The valley is the centre of a chain of valleys which connect India and Burma, having to its east and west those of Kubo Valley and the plains of Cachar, from which, however, it is separated by several ranges of hills which, gradually rise from the two above mentioned valleys reaching their culminating points when they abut on the Manipur Valley.^^15 The height of the valley is about 785 metres above the sea with drainage from north to south.

The valley is dotted with a number of small detached groups of hills, rivers, lakes and swamps. Throughout the valley, the Imphal river runs from north to south with two other important rivers, the Iril and the Thoubal joining its course and forces its way through the southern hills cutting a deep gorge and falls into the Ningthi or Chindwin rivers in Burma. Besides there are a number of rivers most of which fall into the great Loktāk lake. The Loktāk is the biggest lake in eastern India. It covers a little more than

100 square kilometres measuring approximately 13 kilometres in length and 8 kilometres in width. In the broad shallow expanse of water there appeared a number of hilly islands which rise steeply above the surface. Besides the Loktak, there are a number of smaller lakes such as the Waihoul, the Pumlen, the Ikop and others spreading over the whole valley.

The view of the valley is like a world in miniature, a wide plain enclosed on all sides by hills decorated with extensively cultivated green fields, the neat and prosperous looking villages, the sparkling blue waters of its lakes and rivers. Miss Lightfoot describes, its peculiarities thus: "For those who like to dwell on plains, here is the perfect plain, for mountain lovers, there are mountains just the right distance away, neither too awesome nor too intimate, sublime yet friendly. For lovers of the sea, at least there is a vast expanse of inland 'sea', the great lake Loktak provided with little floating island where lovers of solitude could dwell. For lovers of country life every home in Manipur has its own country atmosphere—a pond, a cow, a thatched roof and earthen floor, vegetable garden and in the far distance its own ricefield." 16 Being charmed by its scenic beauty, Mr. Ethel Clair Grimwood also describes it thus, "The valley of

Manipur lies between Cachar, the Kubo Valley and Kohima and is surrounded by ranges of hills which separate it from the tracts of country named, a pretty place, more beautiful than many of the show places of the world, beautiful in its habitable parts but more beautiful in those tracts covered with forest jungle, where the foot of man seldom treads and the stillness of which is only broken by the weird cry of the hooluck or the scream of the night bird hunting its prey."  


Climatic Condition:

The climate of Manipur is cool and pleasant. But on account of its different elevations, it contains within its borders a variety of climate from almost tropical to a greater cold than that of England.  

The heat is never very excessive in the valley and for eight months in the year, it is most enjoyable. When the heat is very oppressive in the neighbouring Kubo Valley and the Brahmaputra Valley, it is fairly cool in the Manipur Valley. Because of the low elevation one may, however, experience excessive heat in summer in plains like Jiribam adjoining the Cachar district of Assam and Morah on the Indo-Burma border. In some of its hill areas there is virtually not hot season but one may experience an
unpleasant cold in winter. The valley is neither too hot nor too cold and is far more pleasant than the hill areas.

Manipur enjoys an adequate amount of rainfall and receives the same from monsoon. The rainy season generally starts from May and continues upto July though occasional rainfall occurs even upto October. There is hardly any rainfall during the winter. The distribution of rainfall is higher in the hill areas on account of their terrain nature and high elevation. While the average annual distribution of rainfall at Imphal is 56.63 inches that for Tamenglong in the hilly region lying to the north west of the valley is 158.15 inches.¹⁹ The soil of the valley is very rich. According to Col. McCullock, "the fertility of the valley was so great that not a particle of manure was placed on the ground and yet year after year good crops were raised from the same spot."²⁰ This fertility of the soil combined with the adequate rainfall resulted the crops in abundance.

The Impact of Geography:

The course of the history and the culture of a people has always been influenced by the geographical features of the country. This is particularly true in the case of Manipur whose unique geographical feature has helped

the Meiteis to develop her distinct culture and civilisation since very ancient days.

Politically, Manipur had been holding her independent existence since very early period till the British conquest of the state in 1891 A.D. As mentioned already, she extended her frontiers far beyond the present boundary. Though her frontiers have advanced or receded from time to time, nature seems to have carved out her geographical limits girding the valley by rings of circular mountains to form a distinct geographical entity. The valley is the homeland of the Meiteis, who by dint of their courage, intellect and resources have made it the centre of her culture and civilization. In the meantime the walling hills act as a dividing barrier for the Meiteis to have close social contacts with the rest of the world. Thus the Meiteis had the opportunity to blossom the seed of their culture independently in their own way. The isolated nature of the country, not only delayed the arrival of any wave of external culture but also instilled a spirit of independence and a sense of suspicion of anything alien or foreign which make them hard to accept anything from outside. Even if they accepted they did it in their own fashion and never imitated blindly. Thus the Meiteis are able to preserve their distinct social and cultural identity in spite of the various waves of change that swept this country in which their neighbours, the Nagas and the Kukis have been swept completely by the strong wave of Christianity.
But unlike them, the advent of Vaishnavism in the eighteenth century with royal patronage has not destroyed the old Meitei culture and religion. In spite of the apparent change of religion, their traditional practices still play an important role in the new faith. Observing this at a time when Hinduism reached its zenith, Col. McCullock remarks, "In fact their observances are only for appearances' sake not the promptings of the heart." His remark has become even more relevant in the present-day situation.

As pointed out already, the surrounding hills are inhabited by various tribes of Nagas and Kukis. These hills with steep ridges and deep ravines inhabited by these tribes form a natural fortress to the valley. "The valley which is the metropolis was quite safe and secure from foreign inroad as the approaches hereto were only through glens and defiles whereon none but the glendoveers could pace firm and secure." Foreigners who attempted to enter the Valley without much local knowledge often met with disastrous consequences. In 1762, an English troop under Mr. Verelst left Chittagong for Manipur but after reaching Cachar it could not make any headway in its march to Manipur. When

21. Ibid., p. 17.
the Ahom king Rajeswar Singh sent an army to Manipur to assist Jai Singh, to drive away the Burmese from Manipur, it shared the fate of English contingent under Warelst. The Ahom army retreated after losing heavy men and materials. The Ahom general's explanation before the king speaks itself of the disaster, "The Manipuri Raja promised to conduct us by showing the way and so we undertake the march. On entering the forest we could not trace the way by any means. Besides many of our soldiers died of blood dysentry and our food provisions also failed. There were no provision, supplies, and Nagas did not allow us passage; they use to roll down stones from hill tops and kill our men by that method. We proceeded one month's journey by clearing the jungle but could not find out any clues whatsoever." During the first Anglo-Burmese War, Brigadier General Sulpham attempted to march towards Manipur from Cachar with a large force. But the geographical features of the country and the incessant rain made him retreat after suffering severe losses. But Raja Gambhir Singh, equipped with a profound knowledge of these tracts, performed the task with his irregular Manipuri soldiers. Thus the peculiar geographical features of the country have also contributed to the formation of a distinct culture and also to the growth of

a political power that withstood the onslaught of foreign invaders specially the Burmese, throughout her long history.

The Different Names of Manipur:

In ancient days the present state of Manipur was called by different names. The legends and chronicles of the Meiteis show that the kingdom was first called "Poirei Namthak Shəronpung." Subsequently, in different ages, it was called by different names such as "Tili Koktom Ahānbā," "Mīrā pongthoklam," "Hānnā Shembā Konnā Loiba" and 'Muapalli.' Though the kingdom was called by different names in ancient days, the name Meiteileipāk (Meitrabāk) has so far been the most popular name of the kingdom through the ages. Dr Brown says, "the name for the Manipur valley recognised amongst the Manipuris themselves is Meiteileipāk or the country of the Meiteis."26

However, all these different names were not used outside the state (kingdom). Manipur was known to her neighbouring kingdoms by different names given by them. In Rennolls' Memoir and maps of India it is called Meckley. In Symes' Narrative and in maps of that period, the state is called the Cassay. The Burmese called it Kathe which term they equally apply to the people and the Shans or those who

25. Shakok Lamlen (MS).
inhabit the country east of the Ningthi or Chindwin river called it Cessay (Kase) of which term the Burmese word Kathe is a corruption. The Ahoms who ruled Assam since the 13th century called it Mekheli and the Cacharis called it Magli while the old Assamese name for it is Maglau.

The fact that the present Manipur is called by different names in different ages and that it is known by different names to its neighbouring kingdoms naturally raise the question whether the name "Manipur" is associated with this land since very ancient period or not.

As noted above, in ancient days the present Manipur was called by different names and that the name "Manipur" has not been found in any of the ancient Meitei manuscripts and chronicles. Besides, the kingdom was never known by that name to her neighbouring kingdoms. Even as late as 1762 A.D. when a Treaty of Alliance was made with the East India Company, it was still referred to as the Kingdom of Meckley, even though the name "Manipur" was in existence by that time. Cheitharol Kumbaba, the most authoritative royal chronicle dating back from the first century A.D. has never mentioned the name "Manipur" until the recent

28. Pemberton, op. cit., p. 20
30. Dun,E.W., Gazetteer of Manipur, Calcutta, 1886, p. 40
past.

There are, however, a few scholars such as Atombapu Sharma and others who hold the view that Manipur has been the name of this kingdom since very ancient period. In support of this they attempt to identify the present Manipur with that Manipur as mentioned in the Mahābhārata where Arjuna secured the hands of the princess Chitrāngadā.\(^{31}\)

But the evidence in support of such identification was flimsy and unreliable and a number of eminent writers and scholars have rejected such claims flatly. According to Sir Edward Gait, "The Manipur as mentioned in the Mahabharata was the capital of Babhrubahana, king of Kalinga. It must, therefore, have been situated somewhere in the south of Orissa or north of Madras. Various sites in that tract have been suggested by Lassen, Opert and others. Its exact position is still uncertain but there can be no doubt whatever that it was nowhere near the place of the same name in Assam."\(^{32}\)

According to Wilson, the "Manipur" of the Mahabharata was situated by the side of the sea and that cannot be identified with the modern Manipur which is far away from the sea coast.\(^{33}\)

Thus the present Manipur lying in the easternmost

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corner of India bordering Burma, buried by clusters of mountain ranges, can under no circumstances be the so-called Manipur as mentioned in the Mahabharata. Besides, the ancient Meitei legends and chronicles have never mentioned anything about the Mahābhārata. It must, therefore, be beyond any doubt that the name Manipur was recent in origin and was coined by Shānti-Dās Goshāi, a Hindu missionary from Bengal during the time of Garibnewāz (1709-1748 A.D.) under whose patronage Hinduism was fully introduced and became the state religion of Manipur. 34

The People of Manipur:

The ancient kingdom now called Manipur has been the home of several ethnic communities. The most dominant among them is the Meiteis, who have been inhabiting the central valley from time immemorial till date. Though they dwell only in the valley which covers about one-tenths of the area of Manipur, the Meiteis constitute about two-thirds of the total population of the state. Outside the state also, a sizeable number of Meiteis settled in some parts of Burma, Bangladesh and in Cachar and in some districts of Assam.

While the valley has been the ancestral home of the Meiteis, the surrounding hills have inhabited by

34. Singh, Bhogeswar, O., Sanamahi Laikan, Imphal, 1972, p.50.
various groups of Naga tribes. The ancient texts and chronicles of the Meiteis show that the major Naga tribes like the Tāngkhul, the Kabuis and the Māos have settled in the hills of Manipur since very ancient period. But the non-Naga tribal community known as the Kuki tribes came from the hills of Burma in the 18th century and they were allowed to settle in the southern hills by the Manipur authority. Within the Naga and the Kuki tribes there are about 29 sub-groups having different tales of their origin and speaking different dialects unintelligible to one another. They, therefore, used the Meitei or Manipuri language as a medium of communication among themselves. The Meiteis called all the numerous tribes in the hills namely the Nagas and Kukis or Khongjais as hāo. Today the use of this nomenclature is considered derogatory by them and hence the word, chingmi (hillmen) is replacing the old terminology.

Besides the Meiteis and hillmen, some Muslims also settled in Manipur. The present Muslim population is mainly the descendants of prisoners of war captured by King Khāgembā (1597-1652 A.D.) in 1606 A.D. The Meitei or Manipuri word for the Muslims is Pāngal, a corruption of Bengal meaning Bengal, for they came from Bengal.

36. Yonuo, Asoso., The Rising Nagas, Delhi, 1974, p. 44.
The Meiteis or Manipuris Proper:

The Meiteis or Manipuris proper are racially a Mangoloid people. As mentioned above, they have been living in the valley of Manipur since very ancient days. They subsequently established their supremacy against the various hill tribes of Nagas and Kukis and also the Shan tribes inhabiting in the Kubo Valley, now in Burma. They had been the ruling community of Manipur throughout her monarchical history. The history of Manipur is, therefore, undoubtedly the history of the Meiteis.

Physically, the Meiteis are a fine race, well-made, strong and active though short in stature. Dr Brown says that the Manipuris are decidedly a muscular race, some of the men are particularly so. They are generally spare in habit of body and fat people are rare. They have good chests and well formed limbs. Sir Edward Gait describes them as wild and warlike people.

Dr S.K. Chatterji describes the Meiteis or Manipuris as the most advanced section of Kuki-Chin people. They have a written script with a fairly rich literature, a well-settled
and organised society, under a monarchical form of government. They kept numerous historical records written in their own scripts about the people and their genealogy, society, religion, government, rulers and their lineages. Their recorded history began from the second quarter of the first century of the Christian era. The royal chronicle, the Cheithārol Kumbābā which dates back from 33 A.D. is one of the oldest of its kind in India. Her dance and music is renowned for its subtle eloquence and solemnity. Her ancient Lāi-harāobā ritual demonstrates the philosophy of life and universe. Her traditional national game, the Sagol Kāngjei (hockey on horse-back), now called the English game of polo is famous all over the world. The Meiteis had thus developed her distinct culture and civilisation since very ancient period. Speaking of the Meiteis, Sir Charles Lyall once said, "I have taken a lively interest in this singular oasis of comparative civilization and organized society set in the midst of congeries of barbarous people over whom its rulers exercise an authority."42 Bowers also subscribes to the same view, "Amid head-hunters, aborigins and predatory and warring neighbours, Manipur is an oasis of civilisation."43

The Origin and Migration of the Meiteis:

The origin and migration of the Meiteis are still

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a mystery. Various writers have formulated different theories, yet no one has ever been able to establish accurately how and when the Meiteis came and settled in Manipur. Sir James Johnstone thought that the Meiteis are a fine stalwart race descended from an Indo-Chinese stock with some admixture of Aryan blood derived from successive waves of Aryan invaders who passed through the valley in Pre-historic days. He further observed, "The Chinese blood in them has made the Manipuris an industrious and inscrutable set of people which the Burmese, Shans and ordinary Asiaties lack." Captain Pemberton also regards the Meiteis or Manipuris to be the descendants of a Tartar Colony which probably emigrated from the north-west borders of China.

While disagreeing with Pemberton, Col. McCulloch, on the basis of certain apparent similarities in the matter of costume, house, language, etc., inferred that the Meiteis are descended from the surrounding hill tribes. But according to W. Robinson, "The Manipuris who inhabit this valley are not generally supposed to be connected with the great family of the Nagas." Hodson who initially subscribed to

44. Johnstone, op. cit., p. 80.
46. McCulloch, op. cit., p. 4.
McCulloch's view later on admits the difficulties of establishing any real connection between the Meiteis and the hill tribes when he says, "Whether the real nature of the connection between the Manipuris and the hill tribes will ever be traced is doubtful, because it is obscured by the lack of historical material, the place of which cannot be entirely taken by comparative ethnology." 48

Brian H. Hodgson expressed the view that "in the Moitay' of Manipur, we have the combined appellations of the Siamese Tai and the Cochin Chinese 'Moy'. In other words the Manipurian tribe called Cossias by the Bengalis, belong to the Moi section of the great tribe called Tai by themselves and Shan Vel Syan by the Burmese, the sectional name being also foreign and equivalent to the native." 49

T.C. Hodson, while commenting on the above view, observed that while the Shan influence has exerted as great an influence over the culture as over the politics of Manipur, it is difficult especially in linguistic grounds to group the Meiteis with the Tai races when the structure and vocabulary of the Meitei language alike agree with those of the Tibeto-Burman races. 50

49. Ibid., p. 10.
50. Loc. cit.
It must, however, be noted in this connection that language cannot absolutely determine the race though it forms an important factor. Edward Gait has pointed out, "Language is no real test of race." According to Dr S.K. Chatterji, the Khasis of Meghalaya are racially Mongoloids but Austric (Mon Khmer) in language probably through contacts with the Austric speakers in very ancient times. Again, in the absence of clear anthropological evidences it is difficult to assess the merits of the above theories.

However, most investigators about the Meiteis, especially the recent ones, have turned their attentions towards the east particularly to Indo-China or South-East Asia. Physically the Meiteis are distinctly Mangoloid in appearance which suggests that their origin should be sought further east. Besides belonging to the same Mangoloid stock, the traditional culture and the behaviour pattern of the old Meiteis have considerable affinity with those of the Shans, Burmese, Chinese, etc., especially in matters of certain basic rituals like, death, ancestor worship, spirit worship, superstition, etc. Further, the similarity between the traditional Meitei religion and that of the people of Indo-China, before the later felt the earliest impact of Indian influence, such as, worship of ancestors, location of shrines on high places,

burial in jars or dolmens, etc., is very striking.

But, in the absence of definite evidences, we cannot ascertain exactly to which branch of Mangoloids the Meiteis belong and from which particular part they have come. In the circumstances, we cannot go beyond the fact that the Mangoloid Meiteis have settled in the valley of Manipur years before the beginning of Christian era. There they have settled in kin-groups occupying definite territorial areas each under a cheiftain. In course of time kings made their appearance and at the dawn of history there began the process of emalgamation of the different tribes under the leadership of the king (cheiftain) of the most powerful group, the Ningthouje salai (formerly also called Meiteis) which ultimately resulted in the formation of a single community called the Meiteis.

Food and Drink:

The principal articles of food of the present-day Meiteis consist of rice, dal, fish and vegetables. Meat in any form is not taken; so also the drinking of alcohol. However, there are positive evidences to show that the pre-Hindu Meiteis used to eat meat and drink wine. The Loi community who did not accept Hinduism, still eat meat and drink wine. Like other items of food, the Meiteis use milk, ghee and other dairy products. Among the fruits pineapple
and orange are the most popular ones.

Dress and Ornaments:

The costumes and ornaments of the Meiteis are varied and complex. The normal dress of the men in former days consisted of Pheijom (the Manipuri dhoti), a shirt, a sheet and a head dress. Today the head dress is no longer worn except for ceremonial purposes and the Indian style of dhoti and kurta and western style dress are the common costumes.

The dress of women is very picturesque and quite different from any other female dress in India. The main garment is known as fanek. It is made of cotton and silk and is either of a uniform colour with a narrow border or has stripes of various colours running across the material. The striped fanek has a broad border at the top and bottom on which geometrical figures or patterns of various kinds are sewn or embroidered by hand with glossy silk of various colours. Older or married women wear it, fold it round the body under the armpits and over the breasts and tuck it in at the side of the body. But girls use to wear it round the waist. The fanek reaches almost the ankles. Over the fanek, a shirt or jacket and a sheet called innaphi (scarf) are worn.

In the days when Manipur was under its ruling monarchs there were strict rules and regulations for dress
and ornaments. Though there were different designs and varieties of attires, people had to wear only those that were permitted by the king and the custom. In the old Meitei society, there was no caste system but there existed a class system, viz., the king and royal family, the nobles, and the commoners. There were prescribed attires to be worn by each of them, a commoner could not wear the costume meant for upper classes unless permitted by the king as a favour or reward. For instance, a particular brand of man's garment called the Kameng Chatpa dhoti may not be worn by persons of inferior rank but the Rajkumars used it at their pleasure, a privilege which is now extended to sons-in-law of the Raja. This dhoti may be worn by commoners only under permission from the king. There were also other varieties of dhotis which could be worn by the nobles in the presence of the king only but anybody may wear them on ordinary occasions provided it was not in the presence of the king. But children may wear them without any restrictions. So was the case with the women's garments. A particular brand called "Pumthit fanek" a richly embroidered cloth cannot be worn by anyone except the eldest daughter of the king. Should the princess die, the fanek would never be worn even by other princesses but would be treasured.

There were also prescribed costumes for all those who took part in the games if played in the presence of the

53. Hodson, op. cit., p. 15.
king such as boat race, polo, wrestling, etc., the details of which will be mentioned in subsequent chapters. In the field of social and religious matters, people had to use the attire which custom permitted or demanded for such occasions. The king and queen wore any kind of garments they pleased. But at the coronation ceremony they were bound to wear the prescribed customary attires. 54

At present men do not wear any ornaments while women wear ornaments mostly made of gold. But precious stones are rarely used. Their ornaments consist of ear-rings and necklaces and bangles. But they do not wear ornaments in the ankles. In former days, permission for the use of gold ornaments by any section of the society except the upper classes was required. But ear-rings in any form could be worn without any restrictions. The wearing of fresh flowers was a common sight of the old Manipuris for both men and women. Dr Brown says that the Meiteis are very fond of carrying flowers in their ear-rings or in the holes in the ears, and in their head-dress. 55

54. According to Phamballon (MS), for the king: leiruthak, chari ningkham, firen furit, lonfi hainingkham, konkha furit, innaphi lengtomphi hainingkham. Besides these another royal dress known as ningthou-fi has been using since the time of King Naophangba (428-518 A.D.) and for the queen: leiren leichao, kumsang fanek, kabrang kanak, kabrang khaon, thabak ngakthom, khuton khutang samhuk tunghang, pheichurengkhang, furit sachonba, firen kanak, tharen fanek, sarongnamthang and khonglikhangpham.

55. Brown, op. cit., p. 78.
Religion:

The majority of the present-day Meiteis profess Hinduism. But a section of the Meitei are still the followers of the traditional faith. Hindu religion was introduced in Manipur in the 18th century by Hindu missionaries from Bengal (Sylhet) under the royal patronage of Garibnawaz (1709-1748 A.D.). But the people were at first opposed to the new faith. Garibnawaz thereupon introduced several repressive measures for the abolition of the traditional customs and practices. He, therefore, imposed Hinduism as a state religion under a royal decree. Being afraid of the wrath of the king, the new faith was somehow accepted. However, they did not abandon most of their traditional faiths and practices. In some of their social and religious functions the old religious practices still played a very important part. Till today religious rituals like Lai-haraoba, ancestor worship, etc., are performed according to the traditional rites and ceremonies and are conducted by the Maibas and Maibis. The Brahmans are practically forbidden in such rituals.

As Hindus, the Meiteis prayed to and worshipped all the Hindu gods and goddesses but in their hours of trials and tribulations they rather turned to their traditional gods and goddesses. It is the common practice of the Meiteis to pray everyday to Sanamahi, the Lord of every household. The cult of Sanamahi is so powerful that even the
Brahmans who are the custodians of the Hindu religion worshipped Him in their households. Likewise, most of the neighbouring hill tribes, before their conversion into Christianity, worshipped Sanāmahi.

The central theme of the old Meitei religion lay in their belief in the existence of a Supreme Being, Tāibang Mapu Sidabā, and his two progenies Sanāmahi and Pākhangbā. Sidabā Mapu is the Lord of the Universe, and the God of gods. His attributes are limitless and indescribable. He is a Formless Divinity but having myriads of manifestations. After the creation of the earth and human beings he withdrew Himself from the world after making Sanāmahi, the Lord of all households and Pākhangbā, the ruler of the earth. The worship of these divinities necessitates one to perceive one's soul, to sacrifice both body and soul for His sake, to obey and respect the parents and the preceptors, to subsist on a clean and unsoiled diet and to have a clean house. Thus in the worship of the Lord, there is a way for the attainment of salvation. This forms the highest echelon of the Meitei faith. All these are enshrined in Shakok Lamlen, a book on the traditional Meitei religion.

With the advent of Hinduism, the Meiteis began to worship Hindu gods and goddesses along with their traditional deities. Thus there developed a distinctive form of Hinduism in Manipur which may be described as Manipuri
Hinduism, wherein the Meiteis rejected many of the tenets of Hinduism and at the same time retaining most of their old rites and ceremonies, social customs and usages. Col. McCulloch also cited that Hinduism in Manipur was superficial. Children and old people never follow the Hindu observances. The Hindu theory and practice of widowhood, child-marriage, dowry, etc., were not followed. The Brahmans were treated with some outward show of respect but inwardly they were not considered to be of superior caste as claimed by them and at times had been taunted with being the sons of the keis (slaves of the king). Thus Hinduism with Manipuris was but a fashion. T. C. Hodson also subscribes to the same view, when he says, 'It is difficult to estimate the precise effect of Hinduism on the civilisation of the people for the outward observer they seem to have adopted only the festivals, the outward ritual, the caste marks and the exclusiveness of Hinduism, while all unmindful of its spirits and inward essential.'

Language and Literature:

The language spoken by the Meiteis is called Meiteilol which literally means the language of the Meiteis.

57. Hodson, op. cit., p. 96.
It is also known as Manipuri language. Though the language originally belonged to the Ningthouja clan or the Meitais it is now spoken by all the communities living in Manipur. There are as many as 29 sub-tribes of Nagas and Kukis in Manipur who speak different dialects and do not understand one another. The speakers of these different Naga and Kuki dialects conduct their conversations in Manipuri. Meiteilol or Manipuri is thus lingua franca of the state. Outside the state, there are speakers of this language mainly in the states of Assam and Tripura and outside India, in Burma and Bangladesh.

Unlike most of the languages of the north-east-frontier of India, Manipuri has a written character of its own. All the ancient manuscripts, chronicles and historical records were written in this script. Before the 19th century, Manipuri was written in a script called the Manipuri script. In the 19th century, the Bengali Assamese script also came to be used side by side with Manipuri script. Even after the conquest of Manipur by the British in 1891, the script was used in many parts of Manipur. "It may not be out of place here to note that the old Manipuri character is still in use in parts of the valley, and that the Bengali character has not yet entirely ousted it." The state chronicle, Cheithārol


Kumbābā, is still maintained by the Maibās of the palace in the old Meitei script. Manipuri is now mainly written in Bengali-Assamese script but with the rise of revivalist movement the old script has been increasingly used. It has now been introduced in some of the schools of Manipur.

Meiteilol or Manipuri has been the official language of Manipur since time immemorial. "When Manipur was an independent sovereign state, Manipuri (Meitei) was used as the official language and court language of this state. Royal edicts of those days are still found in different parts in and outside the present boundary of Manipur inscribed on stone and copper plates." 60

Proper Appellation of Manipuri Language: Many authors have classified the Meitei or Manipuri language within the Kuki-Chin group of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. It is unfortunate that those eminent authors have made such classification. The words Kuki and Chin are synoymous and both of them are used for the same people. Chin is a Burmese name and Kuki is Assamese of Bengali name to denote the same tribe. But the Burmese name for the Meiteis was Kathe, for old Assamese and Ahoms, Makhali or Magli while Bengalis called Cossians. While the Meitei or Manipuri is an advanced modern Indian literature with its own script, the Kuki-Chin language

60. Singh, Khelchandra, N., Manipuri Language: Status and Importance, Delhi, 1975, p. 10.
and other groups of the family are backward languages without any script of their own. Dr S.K. Chatterji, eminent linguist and litterateur of India describes the language thus:

"Among the various Tibeto-Burman languages, the most important and in literature certainly of much greater importance than Newari is the Meithei or Manipuri language. The beginning of this old literature may go back to 1500 years or even 2000 years from now." 61 This language is unquestionably the most important language in eastern India after Bengali and Assamese. 62 In view of its status and importance Dr Grierson and Dr Konow, the author and the writer respectively of the Linguistic Survey of India, expressed the opinion that instead of calling Kuki-Chin, Meithei-Chin would be better appellation. 63

Customs and Manners:

While the traditional customs of the Meiteis will be dealt with later on, it is worthwhile to mention some of their social manners and etiquettes. In their intercourse

62. Ibid., p. 49.
63. "The territory inhabited by Kuki-Chin tribes extends from the Naga Hills in the north down into the Sandeway District of Burma in the South; from the Mithya river in the east, almost to the Bay of Bengal in the west, it is almost filled up by hills and mountain ridges, separated by deep valleys. The denomination, Kuki-Chin is a purely conventional, there being no proper name comprising all these
amongst themselves, the Meiteis are very ceremonious. They address one another by the name of the office they may hold or as younger or elder brothers, uncles, etc. A young man, however well-placed or powerful he might be, never calls an elderly person by name. While addressing an elderly person, the word 'nang' (Meitei equivalent of the English word 'you') is not generally used. If used, it is considered offensive and the use of it sometimes leads to unhappy consequences. The ordinary way of calling uncle is 'khurā' but its polite form is khurā-ibungo, khurā-ngāng, (literally, uncle-child) and so on, which are very difficult to be rendered into English. Again, the ordinary way of saying 'I am eating' is 'ei chāk chārī' but in the polite form it is 'ei chāk chājari'. Similarly, the ordinary form of saying 'I am going' is 'ei chatli' but in the polite form it is 'ei chatchari'. As in the former case, it is also very difficult to have English renderings of these polite forms of speech. If two persons become very intimate friends and once they declare itāo-shānābā (friendship for ever) they henceforth would

tribes. Methi-Chin would be a better appellation as the whole group can be sub-divided into groups, the Meithei and the various tribes which are known to us under the names of Kuki and Chin, I have, however, to avoid confusion, retained the old terminology. "(Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, Calcutta, 1904, vol. III part-II, pp. 1-2.)

address each other as itāo and bow down wherever they meet. The Raja and other members of the royal family used to call the elderly males as 'eepu' which means grandfather and elderly females, 'ebel' meaning grand-mother. The male members of the royal family are all called 'sana' or golden and the females 'sija'. Their actions are described in a different style of language from that of the rest of the people. Thus they do not walk but move; they do not sleep but recline. A common Manipuri, on horseback, would be spoken of 'sagontongle', a prince as 'sagonetle'. The eating of the commoner is designated 'chāk chāba' of the prince 'luk hāba' and so on. According to McCulloch, 'individuals are spoken of and known by their surnames; the laiming or if I may use the expression the Christian name, being seldom known to or used by any but the nearest relatives.'

Economic Condition:

Until comparatively recent times, before the introduction of modern civilisation, Manipur was a self-sufficient kingdom. Agriculture and cottage industries were then the mainstay of the people as they did even today. Her forest resources were immense, specially when Kabo Valley was a part of her kingdom. The terms of the Treaty of 1762 with Governor Verelst, at a time when the Burmese devastated the country

65. McCulloch, op. cit., p. 22.
frequently, also indicate the economic wealth of the kingdom. In the treaty, mention is made of the payment of the following articles, products of the country: Silk, iron, kupass, dammer, wood oil, wax, elephants teeth, sandal-wood, camphor, threads of various kinds, black coss, Meckle cloth and Meckle gold rupees valued at Rs 76,800/-

Within the limits of their resources the people were by and large economically well-off and happy. This was evident from the total non-existence of beggars in the society, though some cases of slavery due to poverty was in existence. Today the Meiteis are economically very backward.

Agriculture: Permanent and irrigated system of cultivation has been practised by the people since very ancient period. It is, however, difficult to say precisely when the Meiteis developed the art of agriculture abandoning the primitive food gathering stage or hunting for subsistence. The ancient religious text, Shakok-Lamlen which enshrined the ancient religious practices, customs and way of life reveals that the Meiteis began to learn the art of cultivation since pre-historic days. In the Lāi-hamong, we find how the Meiteis developed the art of agriculture with various other accompanying rites. Those rites connected with agriculture as mentioned in the Lāi-hamong are still in vague. The ancient text of Poireiton Khunthokpa also reveals that the Meiteis had already

66. Pemberton, op. cit., p. 44.
learnt the art of agriculture before the 1st century.

The valley of Manipur being very fertile, the produce of the crops is naturally very abundant. But rice being the staple food, the cultivation of paddy constitutes the chief economic pursuit of the people. Captain Pemberton says that the agricultural produce of the country consists principally of rice, which forms the staple article of food and the fertility of the soil is so great that the crops generally prove most abundant. The valley not only yields high production but the quality of rice produced is extremely fine and tasty. The demands of most of the neighbouring hill tribes are met from the produce of the valley. The valley is, therefore, rightly called the granary of the hill tribes.

As regards the management of land, formerly all land belonged to the king. There were no permanent holdings and the people paid revenue in kind to the state except those who held revenue-free lands given by the king. An officer called Phunam Sellungba supervised all matters connected with land cultivation, measurement and collection of taxes in kind. The tax in kind paid to the state for one pari of land (2\(\frac{1}{2}\) acres) per year was 12 pots of paddy (approximately seven quintals). With the advent of British administration, the system of paying revenue in kind was

67. Ibid., p. 31.
abolished in 1871 and in lieu of it a sum of rupees five was levied. But the traditional rent of 12 pots of paddy per pari of land is still in practice.

Besides rice, crops like sugarcane, tobacco, indigo, mustard, pulses, maize, etc., are extensively cultivated. Fruits of different varieties are also grown but none of them are cultivated as carefully and successfully as pineapples and oranges.

**Industry**: The art of spinning and weaving has been known to the Meiteis since very ancient days. In *Shakok Lamlen* we find the names of different types and designs of cloths manufactured by the Meiteis. Spinning and weaving have been the most important cottage industry of the Meiteis. Generally every household has at least a loom, and there is rarely any woman who does not know the art of weaving. T. C. Hodson says, "Nearly every housewife is capable of weaving all the cloths needed by her family and the simple loom stands in the verandah of the house." In former days, weaving and spinning also formed a part of the education for girls and women. They were hardly regarded as respectable or qualified unless they know the art of weaving and spinning. But in those days, while the people were free to weave the ordinary cloths, certain specially designed and embroidered cloths as

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69. Hodson, op. cit., p. 27.
used in the coronation of the king and the queen and also their normal attire were to be woven only by some particular families.

The economic wealth of the people provided by their handloom industry is very considerable. Besides meeting all the home consumption, it also meets the demands of the hill tribes as well as other neighbouring kingdoms. The products of this industry are now popular all over India.

Silk industry also has been flourishing in Manipur since very early period. Sir George Watt is of the opinion that Manipur was the home of silk worm and that the real mulberry silk insect originated in Manipur and went from there to China. The silk worm is fed on the mulberry plant. This is extensively cultivated and grown in various parts of the valley. The quality of silk produced in Manipur is fine and formerly there was much demand for it from Cachar and Burma. Captain Pemberton notes: "their silk manufactures which are remarkable for their strength but the brilliancy of their colours are made up principally into petticoats, jackets, and large scarps, the last of which are only worn by the high orders of the male sex. Some of these scarps are richly embroidered and though the work is coarse, they are highly prized in Ava."

70. Ibid., p.44.
71. Pemberton, op. cit., p. 34.
Salt making was in the past a very important industry. It was manufactured mainly from brine springs. That the manufacture reached a considerable degree of proficiency was evident from the fine quality of the salt produced. There were a number of salt springs in the valley especially in the foot-hills. Like land, all the salt springs were owned by the king. And a percentage of the salt produced in each of the springs was levied by the king. T.C. Hodson says, "of the quality produced, 30 percent goes to the king and the remaining 70 percent is divided among the workmen." The quantity of salt thus produced was not only sufficient for the consumption of the inhabitants of the valley, but was also an article of traffic with the surrounding tribes who bartered for it their tobacco, ginger, cloths and cotton.

Other manufactures consists of earthen-wares, iron work, brass and bell-metal, carpentry etc.

A Brief Political History:

The study of a people and their culture cannot properly be investigated without a knowledge of their historical background. It is, therefore, worthwhile to mention a brief historical background of the Meiteis. Being the ruling community,

72. Hodson, op. cit., p. 35.
the history of Manipur is virtually the history of the Meiteis.

There was no regular history of Manipur till 33 A.D. Before that, several chiefs, each independent of one another, were ruling in their strongholds in different parts of Manipur. There were incessant struggles for supremacy amongst themselves, and since the beginning of the Christian era, the Ningthoujā clan began to establish political supremacy by subduing and absorbing within its fold all the remaining principalities one after another in a period that covered several centuries. Thus, the Meitei confederacy was formed under the leadership of the Ningthoujā clan.

The monarchical history of Manipur began with the accession of Nongdā Lāiren Pākhangbā, the founder of the Ningthouja clan in 33 A.D. Since then his male descendents ruled Manipur throughout her monarchical history. Pākhangbā is said to have introduced the system of state service called lallup, according to which it was obligatory for every individual to work for the state without getting any remuneration. 74

The history of Manipur upto the middle of the seventh century was rather vague and ill-delineated. In 663 A.D. Nāothingkhong became the king of Manipur. The most important event of his reign was the visit of Sāmlung, the younger brother of Sukānphā, the Pong king, after his victorious

74. Brown, op. cit., p. 83.
campaign against many kingdoms. The Cheitharol Kumbābā and other chronicles do not record any fight between Nāothingkhong and Sāmlung or any payment in the form of tribute by either of them. It appears that the Meiteis and Pongs by that time had already established friendly relations between them. It is said that Sāmlung lived at Pong Ingkhol (literally the home­stead of pong) for some time and then went back to his country. The Cheitharol Kumbābā recorded his visit in 698 A.D., but Pemberton relying on a Shan account quoted the year of Samlungs visit as 777 A.D. There is thus a difference of 79 years, a rather big gap. Nāothingkhong was succeeded by several kings but until the accession of King Loiyambā no significant event took place during their reigns.

In 1074 A.D. Loiyambā became the king of Manipur. During his reign the administrative set-up of Manipur was re-organised by dividing it into six lups (divisions), viz., angom lup, nongmāi lup, akong lup, khurāi lup, chingjā lup and khāijā lup. Each lup sent a team of workers who were to work for the state 10 days in every forty, according to a fixed routine. Loiyambā’s greatest contribution to the history of Manipur was the introduction of the concept of divisions of labour and the code of conduct which exercised far reaching influence on the Meitei society till today. Every Meitei

76. Pemberton, op. cit., p. 114.
A surname was allotted a particular trade or occupation according to which every individual had to do his or her assigned duty. Thus, all yumnāks or surnames signified their own respective occupations and interchange of occupations was neither allowed nor encouraged. For example, a particular surname Thāngjam had the specific function of making and selling all sorts of iron implements, the Tourangbams and Kangabams, the making of all ornaments and so on. The system in its original form had been in existence till very recently. Even today at the Nupi Keithel (women's Bazar) at Imphal, some particular trades are exclusively run by certain yumnāks. Loiyambā also prescribed a code of conduct to be followed by all in their social intercourse with one another. All these were incorporated in a book called "Loiyambā Shilyen."

Kiyāmbā became the king of Manipur in 1467 A.D. With his accession, the Meiteis began to extend over the neighbouring kingdoms across the hills. He had diplomatic relations with Chouphā Khekhombā, the Pong king of Mogaung, the capital of Pong dominions. One of the most notable events in his reign was the annexation of Kubo Valley to Manipur. After Sāmlong's visit, for nearly seven hundred years, the annals of Manipur recorded nothing worthy of notice. During this period the Meitei supremacy had been established, and the Meitei chief was in 1474 a person of importance, sufficient to permit a Pong king to demand his daughter in marriage. Previously, the Pong king had promised to give in marriage
one of his own daughters to the chief of Khumbat. She was on her way to Khumbat when she changed her mind and, with her father's consent, married another. Considering himself disgraced, the Khumbat Chief vowed revenge, and found in 1475 an opportunity of gratifying it by carrying off the Manipuri bride of the Pong king while she was being escorted to Mogaung by the Pong ambassadors. This act brought upon him the united forces of Pong and Manipur, which immediately attacked him; his fortress was destroyed and himself obliged to fly. Thus, the territory he had governed was transferred to Manipur." 77

After the conquest of Khumbat, the Pong king paid a visit to Manipur and gifts were exchanged. Among the gifts given by the Pong king to the king of Manipur was a stone image of Vishnu. Kiyāmbā started to worship the image but he himself was not initiated into Vaishnavism. 78 Kiyāmbā also introduced several reforms, the most important among them was the introduction of Cheithābā in the festival "Cheirāobā."

Since the death of Kiyāmbā in 1508 until the accession of Khāgemba, several kings ruled Manipur. In the reign of Kabombā 1523–24 Manipur had her first contact with Tekhāo (Assam). 79 Ahom Buranji also records the existence of contact between Manipur and Assam during this period. At about

77. McCulloch, op. cit., pp. 5-6.
78. Jhalajit, op. cit., p. 84.
79. Ibid., p. 89.
1537-38 A.D. the Ahom King Chaopa Shuhummung gave a girl of
the Lanmakhru family named Khuddang to the ruler of Keshe
(Manipur). The ruler of Manipur sent a princess as a return
offer to King Shuhummung.

In 1597 Khāgemba became the king of Manipur. He
was not only a great conqueror but also a reformer of note.
In his reign Manipur had her first contact with the Muslims
from India. In 1606 the king's younger brother Shānongbā
invaded Manipur from Cachar with a large force consisting
mostly of Muslims, equipped with fire-arms. Khāgemba defeated
them and the prisoners were rehabilitated in Manipur. Since
then the Muslims settled in Manipur. In about 1631 A.D. a
Chinese force invaded Manipur. But was successfully repulsed.
Since then he was called Khāgemba which literally means
conqueror of the Chinese. The Chinese, however, did not
reach the present limits of Manipur. They came and violated
the territory in upper Burma which was under Manipur in those
days. Sir James Johnstone, however, ascertained the year of
invasion on a different date. He says, "About the year 1250, a
large Chinese force invaded the country and was signally
defeated; all who were not killed being made prisoners. They

81. Ibungohal and Khelchandra, op. cit., p. 27.
taught the Manipuris silk culture and a number of them were settled at Sushā Kameng, where they have still descendents. The Chinese also taught the art of brick making and erected two solid blocks of masonry in the palace, between which the road to the Lion Gate passed. T.C. Hodson puts the year of Chinese invasion in 1630 A.D. which agrees with the accounts of Cheithārol Kumbābā.

Since the reign of Kiyāmbā in the middle of the 15th century, the political horizon of Manipur began to shine and with the accession of Garibnewāz, the power and prestige of Manipur reached its zenith. During this period the Shan kingdom of Pong began to decline. Its western portion was annexed by Manipur and came to be known as Kase Shan or Shan tributary to Kases or Kathees while the eastern portion was called Mrelap Shan or Shan tributary to Burmahs. Since this period the relation between Burma and Manipur was nothing but of fire and sword. Desai says, "Information as to the early relations between the Burmahs and Manipuris is lost in the midst of pre-history. Later information as to the period from the 17th to the 19th century reveals, however a terrible relationship of plunder and devastation operating from both sides to the damage of both people." It was this bitter

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84. Hodson, op. cit., p. 17.
relationship and the religious change within the state that subsequently accelerated the cultural and political integration of Manipur with India.

Garibnewāz ascended the throne in 1709 A.C. and began a career of conquest as recorded in Burmese annals. Desai writes that Garibnewāz was a brilliant leader marked by much interpredity. Under him Manipur assumed an out and out aggressive role towards Burma and its declining dynasty of rulers. He waged successful wars against the Burmese and reduced the most important towns and villages and at last planted his standard at the capital itself. The expert Manipuri horsemen became the terror of upper Burma. In 1725 he attacked and defeated a Burmese force at the mouth of Magluno river; the following year repulsed an army of 30,000 men which had penetrated into the valley, and captured three entire divisions. In 1735, he crossed the Ningthi river, attacked and destroyed the town of Myedoo, on the banks of Moo river and carried off numerous captives. Two years later, he defeated two Burmese armies, amounting to 7000 foot, 700 horse and twenty elephants and devastated the whole country from the banks of the Khodoung Khyoung to Deebayan. In 1738 he again crossed the Ningthi river, attacked and dispersed a Burmese army of 15,000 foot 3,000 horses and 30 elephants, and at the termination of the rains of the same year at the head of a force of 20,000 man, marched between the Burmese army,

87. Loc. cit.
three divisions of which occupied the towns of Mutseng Deebayen, and Myedoo, and to use the language of the Burmese historians, 'without stopping', attacked and carried the stockaded positions around the ancient capital of Zakaing, of which he obtained possession. D.G. Hall says, "In 1738 they camped near Sagaing, stormed the stockade built to defend the famous Kaunghmudaw Pagoda erected by Thalun, massacred its garrison and burnt every house and monastery up to the walls of Ava." The old door of the eastern entrance of the Kaunghmudaw Pagoda still bears marks said to have been made by the sword of Garibnewāz as he forced his way to slaughter its garrison.

Garibnewāz also resisted successfully and made captive several parties sent from the west to exact from him tribute. In 1727, he invaded Takhel (Tripura) and captured many prisoners. But the event which brought far reaching social consequence was the introduction of Hinduism as the state religion of Manipur. Though some form of it had existed before his time in individual cases, Hinduism became the state religion only under his full patronage. Since his reign a new era in the cultural history of Manipur began which paved the

way for rapid cultural integration of Manipur with the rest of India.

The victorious career of Garibnāz clearly proves that, during his reign, the Manipuris had acquired a very considerable power. All the principal events of his reign have been amply corroborated by the Burmese records, the authenticity of which was beyond any doubt. With the death of Garibnāz the power and prestige of Manipur declined. While his successors were disunited and weak and indulged in treason, intrigue and rebellion for the throne, a new dynasty emerged in Burma under Alaung-Paya, one of the greatest leaders Burma had ever seen. With a desire to revenge against the devastations caused by the armies of Garibnāz, Alaung-Paya invaded and devasted Manipur in 1755 and again, in 1758. Pemberton records this "as being the first occasion on which the Burmese appear to have owed their success entirely, to the use of fire-arms." The invasion was so devastating that Manipur for the first time sought British help in 1762. D.G. Hall writes, "Alaung-Paya's expedition against Manipur inflicted upon the country one of the worst disasters in its history. Thousands of people were deported and settled in the Sagaing and Amarapura districts of upper Burma. From this time the astrologers at the court of Ava were Manipuri Brahmans,

92. Pemberton, op. cit., p. 41.
93. Loc. cit.
while Manipuris formed a cavalary regiment (cassay horse) in the Burmese army."\(^{94}\)

In 1763 Jai Singh formally became the king of Manipur. Soon after this, Asinbyushin, the ruler of Burma invaded Manipur. Jai Singh was defeated and he fled to Cachar. From there he sought the help of the Ahom king, Rajeswar Singh. He gave his daughter Kuranganayani in marriage to the Ahom king, King Rajeswar Singh sent an army under Harnath Phukan in 1765 to assist Jai Singh to regain Manipur. But the army failed to reach Manipur and eventually had to return. Nearly two-thirds of the force perished in the jungle. This is known in the history of Assam as "Lata-Kata Ran."\(^{95}\) Jai Singh, however, managed to regain Manipur and drove away the puppet ruler Eringba. When Asinbyushin died in 1776, his successors Sinbu-Min invaded Manipur in 1782. He met with temporary success but he could not conquer it.\(^{96}\) Pemberton\(^{97}\) says that after this Jai Singh seemed to have an understanding with the Burmese King Badawpaya and remained in possession of Manipur till he abdicated in favour of his son in 1798.

The relation between Assam and Manipur had been always cordial but in Jai Singh's reign it became one of very

\(^{96}\) Jhalajit, op. cit., p. 164.
\(^{97}\) Pemberton, op. cit., p. 45.
active friendship. Even after the death of Rajeswar Singh, he maintained friendly relations with Assam. When the Maomaria rebellion took a formidable turn in 1876, Swargadeo Gaurinath solicited his help. Jai Singh himself led a force in aid of Gaurinath Singh.

During one of his sojourns in Cachar, Jai Singh paid a visit to Dacca-Dakshin, the ancestral home of Sri Chaitanya in Sylhet. Since then he came under the influence of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, Jai Singh then made the Gaudiya sect the state religion in place of the Rammanandi Vaishnavism. Jai Singh also introduced the famous Rās-līlā of Manipur and its first performance was enacted at the installation ceremony of Sri Govindaji.98

Since the abdication of Jai Singh in 1778 till the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 the history of Manipur was one of murder and treachery among his sons for the throne. Lābeinachandra who succeeded his father was murdered in 1800 and Madhuchandra who succeeded him also shared the same fate in 1806. When Chourajit became king, his brother Mārjit almost immediately conspired against him. Having failed, he fled to Burma but returned with a Burmese force, expelled Chourajit in 1813 and occupied the throne. During his reign Manipur regained almost all its former prosperity. Though

Mārjit ascended the throne with Burmese help, acknowledging the suzerainty of the Burmese king, yet within a few years he asserted independence from the Burmese. Old Badawpaya, though offended, could not do anything. When Bagyidaw ascended the throne he summoned Mārjit to the Burmese capital to pay homage. But Mārjit refused to pay fealty to the Burmese monarch. In 1819, a Burmese army invaded Manipur. After an unsuccessful encounter, Mārjit fled to Cachar, where he surrendered to his brother Chourajit. There the three brothers drove away Govindachandra and ruled the whole of Cachar. Meanwhile in Manipur the Burmese committed the most frightful cruelties, in the words of Pemberton, "with the apparent determination of extirpating a race whom they found it impossible permanently to subdue." 99

The state of things continued up to the outbreak of Anglo-Burmese War. In 1825, Gambhir Singh with 500 Manipuri troops armed by the British Government expelled the Burmese from Manipur and occupied Kubo Valley up to the west bank of the Ningthi or Chindwin river. 100 The Kubo Valley was, however, handed over to Burma at the desire of the British Government. Gambhir Singh re-asserted the authority of Manipur over the remotest parts of the hills by coercing Naga villages including Kohima. 101

100. Ibid., p. 49.
Since the death of Gambhir Singh, internal disputes and dissensions with regard to succession plagued the history of Manipur. Any descendant of a ruling family who had the slightest chance of success did not hesitate to make an attempt for the throne. Such disputes and dissensions amongst the princes led to the introduction of British rule in Manipur in 1891 which changed the course of its history, the details of which will be dealt with in Chapter VII.

After the conquest of Manipur in 1891, the British Government, however, placed a Raja on the vacant throne but the real administration of the state lay in the hands of the British Government. This state of affairs continued until India's independence when Manipur was formally merged into it. With the British administration some of the traditional laws and institutions of the rule of the Rajas were gone.

Social and Political Relation of the Meiteis with the Hill Tribes:

Though belonging to different ethnic groups the relation of the Meiteis with the Nagas and Kukis has been on the whole very cordial. In spite of the intermittent hostilities and conflicts there had always been a sense of brotherhood and oneness between them. Till today, while the Meiteis call the people from the rest of India Mayangs (outsiders), the same has never been applied to the Nagas and Kukis irrespective of their place of habitation. This outlook amply
demonstrates how close the Meiteis are to the Nagas and Kukis.

However, the Meiteis did not establish any connection social or cultural with them until they were subjugated and brought under some control. Before that most of the hill tribes being fierce head-hunters, any contact with them was rather risky. Anyone who intruded into their land willingly or accidentally would certainly face the risk of being killed in the most frightful way.

The history of Manipur reveals that the Meiteis after consolidation of their position in the valley began to subjugate the hill tribes and imposed authority over them. Irengba, the Meitei king (984-1074 A.D.) established Hāomachā Loishang, an institution for the tribals of Manipur. By the time of Loiyambā (1074-1122 A.D.), the domain of the Ningthoujā kings included many of the hills now situated within the present boundary of Manipur. Since the time of Kiyāmbā the Meiteis firmly established their supremacy not only in the hills but also over other tribes inhabiting the Kubo Valley, now in Burma.

However the hill tribes who were by nature very wild and aggressive, sometimes plundered remote Meitei villages adjacent to the hills. Dr Brown writes, "The


Tāngkhuls and Luhupas occasionally make raids into the valley itself, but like all hillmen, afraid to quite the shelter of their hills for any distance, and easily beaten back by the pony cavalry of the state."¹⁰⁴ According to B.C. Allen, the Manipuris suppressed the turbulence and insubordination of the hillmen with stern severity. So firm was their rule that by some it was thought that the leopard had actually changed its spots, and that Nagas and Kukis had lost even the potentialities of violence.¹⁰⁵ Sir James Johnstone notes that the Burmese tried in vain to subdue the Tāngkhuls and in one case a force of seven hundred men that they sent against them was entirely annihilated. But when the Manipuris advanced they behaved as if they had always been peaceful subjects of Manipur.¹⁰⁶

The Meiteis, in former days, did also extend their sway even into the interior parts of Naga Hills. This is evident from the Manipuri names of many Naga villages in addition to their own. But during the period of her decadence just before and during the Burmese War of 1819-25, whatever influence Manipur had was gone. But Gambhir Singh re-asserted the authority of Manipur over the area and reduced to submission several Naga villages including Kohima, the

¹⁰⁴ Brown, op. cit. p. 71.
¹⁰⁶ Johnstone, op. cit., p. 233.
largest of them. As token of conquest, he set up a stone at Kohima and stood upon it and carved his foot-prints, the insignia of a dragon and an inscription. The stone was removed from its original site and it now lying in the Museum at Kohima.

According to Johnstone, "The Nagas greatly respected this stone and cleaned it from time to time. They opened a large trade with Manipur and wherever a Manipuri visited a Naga village he was treated as an honoured guest at a time when a British subject could not venture into the interior without risk of being murdered." 107 Upto the Naga hills campaign of 1879-80, the Nagas regarded Manipur as a greater power than the British. The Nagas solicited Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh's help to fight against the British. The Maharaja, however, declined the request. 108

Internecine warfare was very frequent among the hill tribes. Whenever such incidents occured, the Meitei Kings used to send punitive forces to the offending tribes or villages. When the Lushai tribes from the south of Manipur oppressed Kabui Nagas and other Kuki tribes of Manipur, Maharaja Chandrakirti sent punitive expeditions against the

107. Ibid., p. 23.
108. Roy, op. cit., p. 89.
Lushais. In 1872 a force of 2000 Manipuris entered the Lushai country and was stationed at Chibu, now in Mizoram. Three large districts of Po-in-Swe, Linkham and Thanzan-Khum-mate in Lushai consisting of 112 villages paid to the king a yearly tribute of gongs, elephant tusks and salt. In commemoration of the expedition, the Manipuris erected stone inscriptions with the footprints of Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh at Chibu. Several Lushai Chiefs afterwards visited Imphal and swore before the Maharaja according to their customary oaths that they would never again commit acts of aggression towards the subjects of the Maharaja and renounce making human sacrifices for the obsequies of their Chiefs.

The imposition of Meitei rule over the hill tribes has brought far-reaching consequences to the benefit of both the people. Internecine warfare which had so long been a way of tribal life was done away by the Meitei intervention. Consequently, the frightful practice of head-hunting disappeared to a great extent at least, among the tribes who were under Manipur rule. Even to those who lived in remote hill areas and were not directly administered but who paid some kinds of tributes. "Manipur does some good to these distant tribes as

it suppresses feuds and makes the road safe for travellers and gradually introduces the thin end of the wedge of civilisation.\textsuperscript{111}

As a result of frequent contacts with the Meiteis, many of the Nagas and Kukis began to learn and speak Manipuri and this language became the lingua franca among the different hill tribes who could not communicate to one another through their different tongues and dialects. This had become a strong unifying force amongst themselves and also with the Meiteis. Trade and social intercourse between the Meiteis and the hill tribes became a regular feature. Even after the introduction of Hinduism in the valley traditional intercourse of friendship continued unabatedly. Though the Hindu notion of purity and impurity permeated the Meitei society, intermarriage with the hill tribes continued as before. The Naga social-system, viz., the clan organisation exogamous marriage, etc., was also based upon the fashion of the Meiteis and all their clans had Meitei titles such as Ningthoujā, Khuman, Luwāng, Angom, Khābā, etc.\textsuperscript{112} Besides, the titles of their village officials bear Meitei names such as Khullākpa, Luplākpa, Khulpu and Meitei Lambu. Had there been no British administration and European missionary

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{111} Administration Report of Manipur Political Agency, 1877-79, p. 16.
\end{thebibliography}
activities, the people of these areas might have gradually accepted the Manipuri culture. \(^{113}\)

The erstwhile famous festival of "Mera Hāochongbā" held every year in the month of October at the capital was a gathering of the hill tribes of Manipur to pay their fealty to the Meitei king. On that occasion, all the hill chiefs in Manipur assembled at the state capital and displayed various cultural performances before the king and was concluded with much fun and merriment. Dr Brown describes it thus, "The festival called Hāochongbā lasts for only one day; it is a gathering of the hill tribes under the Manipur Government, and is a curious sight on account of the great number of different tribes assembled, with their curious dress and weapons, differing from each other in feature and language but all unanimous in one particular to get drunk as speedily and remain so long as possible. The hill men indulge in feats of strength before the raja such as carrying heavy weights, etc. They also indulge in war dances and sham fights. The sports of the day conclude with a feast, at which they are regaled with the flesh of cows, buffaloes, dogs, cats, etc., which may have died in the valley."\(^{114}\) The festival was held every year till Manipur came under the British paramountcy.

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\(^{113}\) Roy, op. cit., p. 73.

\(^{114}\) Brown, op. cit., p. 83.
The legends and traditions of the hills invariably indicate that the Nagas, Kukis and Meiteis were the descendants of the same parents and that the first Meitei was the youngest of the three brothers. These legends might have been invented, to explain a state of affairs needing some explanation; yet it remains a clear evidence of their recognition of fraternal relationship with the Meiteis. The Lai-harāobā ritual of the Meiteis also illustrates the ties that have existed between the Meiteis and the Tāngkhuls since pre-historic days. At a certain stage of the ritual, the appearance of a Tāngkhul is inevitable which definitely explains the closeness of the Meiteis and the Tāngkhuls since time immemorial. Historical evidences also show that there were blood ties between the Meiteis and the hill people. In the first century A.D., many valley people belonging to some other clans, being afraid of the wrath of King Pakhangbā of the more powerful Ningthoujā clan, took shelter in the hills and they were subsequently absorbed by the tribal community. Similarly, many hill people, mostly prisoners of war, taken by the Meitei kings were absorbed by the Meitei society.

The relation between the Meiteis and the hill tribes on the whole shows that, in spite of the conflicts and hostilities which punctuated different stages of history, a sense of love and brotherhood has been the hall-mark of the
relation between the Meiteis and various hill-tribes. But today the age-old fraternal ties between the Meiteis and hill tribes are beginning to fade gradually as the latter have been swept away completely by the strong currents of Christianity and tribal groupism.