Chapter I  
INTRODUCTION

The present Manipur, a state of India in its north-eastern corner, lies between latitude 23°50'(N) and 25°40'(N), and longitude 93°10'(E) and 94°50'(E). It has a total area of about 8628 sq. miles. Of this a span of about 700 sq. miles forms the broad valley which is surrounded on all sides by columns of lofty hills.

This small plain is the homeland of the Meeteis. They have seven primary constituent units called yeks or salais. They are Mangang, Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Moirang, Kha-Nganba and Sarang-Leisangthem. There are also many immigrants in this valley. Both in the pre-historic days and in the later ages people from outside came to this land for permanent settlement. Earlier immigrants excluding those who remain still as Loi population¹ in the remote areas of the valley were integrated into the Meetei community and assigned to one or other of the yeks. Subsequent immigrants - mainly Brahmins-

1. Loi Population: The ancient Chakpa immigrants who did not mix up with the original population and who settled at the remote areas of the valley near the foot-hills, such as Sekmai, Payeng, Koutruk, Khurkhul, Leimram, Andro, etc. constitute the Loi population. To these Chakpas, later, were added those Meeteis who refused to accept Hinduism imposed on the people by King Pamheiba in the beginning of the 19th century A.D. The exiles of the state also, during the time of the Kings, joined the Loi population.
were in general assimilation but were not assigned to any yek. ¹
They remain as priests of Hindu religion in Manipur. The Muslim population consisted mostly of captives during the reign of King Khagemba. Afterwards some Muslims came to this land and settled here permanently. Since the Muslims are mostly from Bengal they are called Pangals (a corrupted use of the word Bengal).² Like the Brahmins, these Muslims also were not assigned to any Meetei yek, though they lived with the original population in the valley since the time they came to this land.

In the hills that surround the valley, there are different tribes: the leading ones being the Kabuis of the north-west and west; the Maos and Marams of the north; the Tangkhuls of the north-east and the east; the Murrings of the south-east and the central hills; the Anan Nanfous, Taraos, Moyongs, Monsangs and Lamkangs of the south and the south-east; the Thadous, Kukuies and Paites of the south and the south-west. Besides there are other hill tribes such as Koms, Chothes, Koirengs, Cheerus, etc.

These two groups of people, the Meeteis in the plain and the different tribes in the surrounding hills, had been

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1. Manipuri Brahmins: A small group of the Brahmins came to this land in the middle of the 15th century during king Kyamba's time. Till the time of king Charairongba their number was small. In the reign of Pamheiba and afterwards they came in large number. (Bamon Khunthoklon)

2. Pangals: The Meeteis called the Muslims Pangals as they came from Bengal. Most of them were deserters of Mughal Army. They came here as invaders in favour of prince Sanongba, brother of the then king Khagemba. But they were defeated at the hands of the Meeteis. As captives they settled here. (Pangal-Khunthoklon)
living together in this small country as brothers since time immemorial. The very close relation between them is a fundamental point for study in tracing their origin.

The present state of Manipur has as its boundary, the state of Nagaland in the north, Cachar district of Assam in the west, some portion of the present Mizoram in the south-west, while in the south and the east it has common frontier with Burma. The neighbours call this land differently: "The Burmese call it Kathe, the Assamese Mekle, while, according to Colonel MacCulloch, the Bengali name for the State is Moglai."¹

The names of the land in the early chaks,² according to the puyas (ancient written records) and the traditional legends were Tillikoktong Ahanba in Hayi Chak, Mira-Pongthoklam in Haya Chak, Hanna Semba Konna Loiba in Khunung Chak and Muwapali Mayai Sumtongpan in early Konna (Langba) Chak. In the later ages of Konna (Langba) chak, it was popularly known as Kanglei-Pungmayol, Kangleipak and Meitrapak. R. Brown writes, "the name for the Manipur valley recognised amongst the Manipuris themselves is Maithi Leipak, or the country of the

1. Hodson, T.C., The Meitheis, p. 1; and also Brown, R., Statistical Account of Manipur, p. 2

2. Early Chaks: The Meeteis believed in two great Time Orders: Hangkos and Chaks; the former is the divine age which man can only imagine, the latter is the age of the human beings. The Chaks are four in number: Hayi, Haya, Khunung and Konna (Langba). Hayi, Haya and Khunung are early chaks.
Maithi's. ¹ In no known time of the land and its people these words Maithi and Maithi leipak were found in use except in the writings of Atombapu Sharma. ² This might be corrupted expression of the words by Britishers who are not familiar with the native pronunciation.

But without any reference to these earlier names, and also to the currently used word Meetei, the land has now come to be known as Manipur. This change of name is but an obvious repudiation of its ancient tradition. This is clear from the writings of Hodson and Brown. R. Brown writes, "the name Manipur is thus accounted for by the Manipuris, who quote the Mahabharat in confirmation of its accuracy: they say - the name is from mani, a jewel; this jewel was formerly in possession of the rajas of the country ages ago. The country was at one time named Mahendrapur or Mahendrapahar (the name of a high hill situated but a short distance to the east of the capital), but on a raja, by name Babra Baha, coming into possession of the jewel, which formerly belonged to a Nag Raja or Serpent King, and the gadi, he changed the name to Manipur." ³

1. Brown, R., Statistical Account of Manipur, p. 4
2. Sharma, A., Meitei Kirtan, p. 124. Here Shri Sharma refers to the words Mithi and Meithai. Mithi was a group of Kshatriyas who migrated to this land in the ancient days, according to Sharma. Meithai means the Mithis who came over to this land for permanent settlement and used to burn the dead instead of burying, and from this burning of the dead which the Meeteis call in their language Meithaba, the word Meithai comes, according to Sharma.
Quite a similar passage is found in T.C. Hodson regarding the change of the name of the land and its people. These British writers however take these views to be resting on very slender foundation. Their impression was that these ideas grew only when the people became Hindus at the beginning of the 18th century A.D. Till the end of the 17th century in the Royal Chronicle Cheitharol Kumbaba the word 'Manipur' was never used.

To trace the origin of a group of people living in a secluded place of the world for centuries is really a difficult task. The main sources available for the purpose are the ancient traditional legends, cultural life and social beliefs, the puyas or the written accounts handed down to posterity by the forefathers of these people. Besides, the present Manipuris (who now call themselves Hindus) and the Manipuri Brahmins (the priests of the Hindu religion as followed in Manipur) also have their accounts of Indo-Aryan descent. Whatever may be the basis of their accounts, it is worthwhile to have a careful look into these accounts to ascertain the origin of these people in this land. Further (though Hinduism has kept them apart) the close relation between the people in the plain and those in the hills surrounding the valley, cannot be ignored in a sincere attempt to trace their origin.

1. Hodson, T.C., The Meitheis, p. 7
2. cf. Khelchandra, Cheitharol Kumbaba.
Britishers' accounts regarding this land and its people, though written at a time when Hinduism was at its zenith in this land, are highly illuminating and provide us with gems of valuable information.

Thus three views can be observed broadly in this regard: (a) the view of the Brahmins, (b) the views and surmises of the British writers on the issue and (c) the view as held by the people themselves following their forefathers' tradition, culture and social beliefs.

The people of this land known as the Meeteis were converted into Hinduism late in the beginning of the 18th century A.D. during the reign of king Pamheiba. As T.C. Hodson writes, "To the royal will of Pamheiba, the monarch in whose reign the fortunes of the state reached their zenith, Hinduism owes its present position as the official religion of the state. At first the decrees of the king received but little obedience and the opposition to the change centered mainly round numerous members of the royal family who were supported, not unnaturally by the Maibas, the priests of the older religion. Religious dissent was treated with the same ruthless severity as was meted out to political opponents, and wholesale banishments and execution drove the people into acceptance of the tenets of Hinduism."¹ This clearly shows that Hinduism was forced on the

¹ Hodson, T.C., The Meitheis, p. 95
people of this land by their king. After this forcible conversion, in due course, the Brahmins, the priests of the new religion, started enunciating the theory of Indo-Aryan Descent as they got full and blind support of their followers, the Manipuri Hindus, under the royal patronage. Thus the land was given new name, Manipur. In support of their theory they used to refer to the Mahābhārata, the great Hindu Epic. Their main plea was that Arjuna, the great Pāṇḍava hero, married Chitrāṅgadā, the princess of Manipur while in his sojourn in this land as part of his pilgrimage towards the east near the sea shore. There Arjuna left a son named Babru Bāhan by Chitrāṅgadā. The Manipuris are none but the descendants of Arjuna, the Aryan hero, and hence they are Aryans, they claim. But, here also, simply from a man's coming to this land and leaving behind a son the conclusion that all the people in this land should be taken to be Aryans is unwarranted. In his book 'The Meitheis' Hodson writes, "By the end of the Dapar Jug and the beginning of the Kali Jug (year 3435), Enoog Haoba Chanoo, the wife of Babroobahan gave birth to a son called Pakhangba. He used to assume the form of gods by day, and by the night he used to be a man."¹ He further says that around the personage of Pakhangba legends have grown up which declare him to have had the power of changing his shape into that of a

¹. Ibid., p. 5
snake, and his death, which alone proved his being a human being was due to the accidental infliction of a wound by his son, who saw his father in the house at night and killed him unwittingly with a spear. Hodson reports other versions of the origin of Ningthouja or royal clan. From one of the versions he takes the following genealogy. "The Brahma Deva (the creating God of the Universe) had sprung out from the naval lotus of Narayan (the protecting God of the Universe), Marichi Muni (a Hindu sage) was born from the limbs of Brahma deva. Marichi's son Surja (sun); Surja's son, Shaborna Muni; Shaborna's son Indoo Muni; Indu Muni's son Chitraketu; Chitraketu's son Chitradhaja; Chitradhaja's son Chitrabiija; Chitrabiija's son Chitra Sarba; Chitra Sarba's son Chitra Rat; Chitra Rat's son Chitra Vanoo. Chitra Vanoo had no son, only a daughter named Chitrangada; Chitrangada's Babrubahan; Babrubahan's son Sooprabahu; Suprabahu's son, Pakhangba (Jobista). The Jobista or Pakhangba was the first ruling king of Manipur."¹ But here he observes that such tales are obviously tainted by the influence of Hinduism, and the appearance of non-Hindu names seems to mark the beginning of native legend.² R. Brown while referring to the denial by the Manipuri elite of their origin from the hill tribes surrounding

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
the valley, quoted the view of the Manipuri Hindus thus, "They state that they always belonged to the valley and have always been a separate race, and Hindus. They account for their origin thus, and quote the Mahabharata in support of their statement: When the five brothers (pandabas) were expelled by Raja Durjyedhan from Hastina (Delhi), they, in their wanderings, came to this part of the country, and one of them, the second brother, named Bhima, married Hirambi at Kachar, and had a son named Gututh Kutcha, whose descendants called Bhimaputras, are still living in Kachar. The third brother, Arjuna, entered Manipur, and subsequently married Chitrangada, daughter of the raja of the country, and had a son named Babra Bahaa, who came in possession of the gadi. Since the accession of Babra Bahaa, they assert they have been Hindus. They also state that as the appearances of the Bhimputras now living in the Kachar district are alike to theirs, they have no hesitation in drawing the conclusion that they are descended from the 'Pandabs'."

Among modern writers Shri Atombapu Sharma, with his voluminous publications, advocate a new theory of the Indo-Aryan origin of the Meeteis. According to him the Meeteis are none but the mithis who migrated to this land at a time when Hinduism even was not in its present form. The Mithis he said,

1. Brown, R., Statistical Account of Manipur, p. 57
2. The Mithis, as Atombapu Sharma mentioned in his Meitei Kirtan, are a group of Kshatriyas, who are descendants of the person who came out from the dead body of king Nimi who died due to a curse given by sage Vashista. This person's name was Mithil, the man who came from dead body and his descendants were known as Mithis. Meitei Kirtan, pp. 122-124
were Kshatriyas (Vedic Aryans) who used to go with their Purohits in search of a place in the east for their permanent settlement. In their onward journey towards the east they found Sadnira (Kartoya) river which they could not cross. They settled there for some time and the place was then called Mithila (the land of the Mithis). Afterwards they started their move towards the east crossing the Sadnira river. When their leader asked the God of Fire as to what would be the place for their settlement, he was told that it should be Prāchin Bhawan. The Mithis thus moved towards the east to reach Prāchin Bhawan, which is but Yumphal (Imphal, the capital of this land). After travelling for a pretty long time towards the east facing number of hardships, they entered Yumphal through Ngaprum Chingjeng. On their way to Yumphal they settled for sometime at Koutruk. During their stay at Koutruk they made the Chakpas look after the Fire they brought all along their long journey for their sacred worship and use. (This Fire is still today preserved by the chakpas at Andro. Sharma claims, as Poireitongi Khunthokmei). Then as the Mithis permanently settled in this land, the land came to be known as Mithilpat, the land of the Mithis. From this Mithilpat came Meethei leipak and then Meitei Leipak. This is the Indo-Aryan Account as given by Shri Atombapu Sharma. The migration

1. Poireitongi Khunthokmei means the fire associated with Poireiton at the time of migration. Shri Sharma's view is different from the traditional view as revealed in Poireiton Khunthok.
of the Mithis to this land occurred in the eighth century B.C.¹

Shri Sharma supports his theory by referring to Cheitharol Kumbaba (Royal Chronicle). Nongtalai Pakhangba, the first king in the historic age, was requested by his wife Laisna to enable her to assume the form of god by day and human being by night. Pakhangba told her that she could not do so as she was one who migrated with Poireiton. What Sharma intends to point out here, is that, though there had been the original population, there was migration of people from outside in the ancient days. The original people looked at the migrated people little differently. In support of his theory he further refers to the death ritual of the Mithis, the migrated people, who used to burn the dead instead of burying. This burning ritual of the dead, he points out, is purely of Indo-Aryan origin brought to this land by the Aryan immigrants. In Meeteilon, the word 'burning' means Meithaba (Mei = Fire, Thaba = Burn). From this Meithaba of the dead there came the word 'Meithai' which ultimately became the word Meitei, which is the name of the people of this land. As the people have come to be known as the Meiteis, their land also came to be known as Meitei Leipak.

In support of his theory Shri Sharma further draws a number of parallels between Meetei and Vedic culture. He goes even to the extent of claiming that the Vedas began in Manipur.

¹ Sharma, A., Meitei Kirtan, p. 157
From his writings it is evident that he seeks to give an Indo-Aryan coloring to every place, event and cultural tradition of this land. Some of the glaring instances for this are given below:

Shri Sharma says that the religion of the early Manipuris was Krisna Yajur Veda. They followed Gabamayan Yagya. This is evident from their traditional belief in the immortal guru (Guru Sidaba). Guru assuming the form of a dead bull, floated down the great river of the land to test the intelligence of his sons. Of his sons the youngest one could recognise the dead bull to be the Guru. Guru blessed him for his intelligence and gave the title Pakhangba. The dead bull was then divided into seven parts, as instructed by the Guru, and distributed among seven groups of people. This became the origin of the seven yeks or salais of the Meetei Khunai. This division into seven yeks is just a counterpart of the Gotra system of the Vedic Aryans.¹ Another instance is that of Pratnouks of the Rg-Veda. He says that this Pratnouks, is Prāchin Bhawan which is but Yumphal, the first dwelling place of the Meeteis.² Still another reference is to the Supreme Deity Sanamahi of the Meeteis. According to him Sanamahi is but Syon Mahya (Garuda) of the Vedas and Purāṇas of the Vedic Aryans.³

¹ Ibid., p. 137
² Ibid., p. 109. Pratnouks = Pratna (Prachin) + Oks (Bhawan) = Prachin Bhawan; Yumphal = Yum (Bhawan or Oks) + Ahanba (Pratna or Prāchin) = the first dwelling place of the human beings.
³ Ibid., p. 111
Besides, Shri Sharma gives an Indo-Aryan colouring to the important places, events and personalities of the Meetei. Even the kings are given Sanskrit names. Some of the instances are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meetei name</th>
<th>Sanskrit name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kongba Mara</td>
<td>Gaybi Ganga</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nungjeng Pukhri</td>
<td>Bindu Sarobar</td>
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<td>Laitang Lairam</td>
<td>Bhargwas Tirtha</td>
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<td>Pumlen</td>
<td>Poulamma Tirtha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sekmai Turel</td>
<td>Soubhadra Tirtha</td>
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<td>Karang Chinglak</td>
<td>Karam Dham</td>
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<td>Moirang Turel</td>
<td>Agasta Tirtha</td>
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<td>Hiyangthang ching</td>
<td>Sthirachal giri</td>
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<td>Nongmaiching</td>
<td>Udayachal giri</td>
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<td>Chingoi Turel</td>
<td>Baruni Nadi</td>
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<td>Mongbahanba Umang</td>
<td>Bakdanda ban</td>
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<td>Koubru ching</td>
<td>Koumar Prabat</td>
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<td>Turel Achouba</td>
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<td>Loktak</td>
<td>Lakshmibin</td>
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<td>Karang Ching</td>
<td>Karang giri</td>
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<td>Moirang</td>
<td>Mahirangapur</td>
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<td>Bishenpur</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nongpok Ningthou</td>
<td>Indra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marjing</td>
<td>Kuber</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wangbren</td>
<td>Yama</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meetei name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Khorifaba</td>
<td>Barun</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irum Ningthou</td>
<td>Agni</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thangjing</td>
<td>Aśinikumar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chingkhei Ningthou</td>
<td>Mahadeva</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loyarakpa</td>
<td>Bayu deva</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taoroinai Pakhangba</td>
<td>Nagraj Ananta</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heibokching</td>
<td>Rhangnesore Giri</td>
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In his book Pakhangba, Shri Sharma gives Sanskrit names to all kings from Nongtalai Pakhangba downwards. But this is in fact contrary to what has been written in the Royal chronicle, Cheitharol Kumbaba. Only from king Pamheiba in whose reign there had been the forcible conversion of the Meeteis into Hinduism, the Meetei kings had been given Hindu names. Before that there were no kings having Sanskrit names.¹ No Sanskrit names of the land are publicly known anywhere still today.

This Indo-Aryan Account as given by Sharma has been assessed by Dr. Saroj Nalini Parratt thus, "the most remarkable claim for Aryan (Vedic) origin for the Meeteis may be found in the voluminous writings of Atombapu Sharma. While one may admire this writer's deep knowledge of Sanskrit, his attempt to

¹. Cheitharol Kumbaba, p. 60. R.K. Sanahal also followed Sharma in ascribing Sanskrit names to the places, gods, kings and events of this land. As there is no public notice of such things, they remain in the books of these writers only. See his 'Satjal'.

draw parallels, at so many points between the Meeteis and Vedic culture (even to the extent of claiming that the Vedas began in Manipur) is too much like special pleading to be convincing."

At any rate the account of Sharma has got its own shortcomings. His is a purely Hindu oriented account to the utter ignorance of ancient tradition, culture and the puyas of the people of this land. Not only Shri Sharma, other Manipuris like Yumjao Singh and Ibungohal Singh also wrote as if the Meeteis had an Indo-Aryan origin, following the tradition of the Brahmins.

British writers particularly, Hodson, Brown, Pemberton and McCulloch did not accept the Indo-Aryan Theory of the origin of the people in this land. They used to make their own observation on the issue, giving due regard to the age old tradition, culture, way of life, physical structure and the food habits etc. of the people in this land. The social background of the people (even though it has been transformed to a great extent by the new religion, i.e., Hinduism) stands as a refutation of the theory of Indo-Aryan descent of the Meeteis.

T.C. Hodson began with the report of the genealogy of Ningthouja (ruling) clan as given by the Manipuri Brahmins. Then immediately he stated that such tales were obviously

2. cf. Singh, Yumjao, An Early History of Manipur; and Singh, Ibungohal, Introduction to Manipur.
tainted by the influence of Hinduism, and the appearance of non-Hindu names seemed to mark the beginning of the native legend. To him the claim of the Manipuris for a Hindu Descent is quite untenable, and rests upon a very slender foundation. In view of the composite character of the languages spoken by the different tribes, their common appearance and structure, tradition and culture Hodson was in favour of regarding the Manipuris to be descendants of the surrounding hill tribes. He observed, "Tradition brings the Moirang tribe from the South, the direction of the Kookies, the Koomul from the East, the direction of the Murrings, and the Meithei and Looang from the North-West, the direction of the Koupooees. The languages of the Murrings, Kookies, and Koupooees are all very similar, and as the Koomul, etc., the offshoots of these tribes were, as before said, at different periods the dominant tribes in the valley, it might be expected that the present language of the people, united under the name of Meithei, would have a very apparent likeness to these languages, and such is the case.

All these tribes have also traditions amongst themselves that the Munniporees are offshoots from them. These traditions then, and the composite nature of the language, appear to me to afford more reason for supposing the Munniporees to be descended from the surrounding hill tribes than from a Tartar

1. Hodson, T.C., The Meitheis, p. 5
Colony from China.\(^1\)

T.C. Hodson's stimulating reflection about the descent of the plain people from the surrounding hills runs thus:

"This careful opinion drew the consent of Dr. Brown, who adorned it with some interesting speculations. Should it be a correct view that the valley of Munnipore was at no very distant period almost covered entirely by water, the origin of the Munnipories from the surrounding hill tribes is the proper and only conclusion to be arrived at. I think it probable that when only a small part of the valley skirting the hills was capable of cultivation, the hillmen bordering it used to descend and cultivate the little land there then was, returning to their homes in the hills after reaping their harvests; as, however, land increased, some few of them settled permanently in the plain, gradually increasing in numbers. The various tribes thus settling in different parts of the valley would in time come into contact, and after a struggle for supremacy, amalgamate. That this is what actually did take place is borne out by the traditions of Munnipore.\(^2\) Hodson is however unhappy as this hypothesis is not readily acceptable to the Maninuris who have been swayed by the new religion (Hinduism) and who want to maintain themselves as a separate race without any...

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1. Ibid., p. 6
2. Ibid., p. 7
connection with the tribes in the surrounding hills. He further strengthens his stand by referring to the legends of their ancestors and various customs of the hill tribes observed by the Meeteis. The ceremony denominated Phambankaba or ascending the throne, is performed in Naga dress, both by the king and the queen, and the Yim Chou, or 'great house', the original residence of the Meetei Chief, is, though he does not now reside in it, still kept up, and is made in the Naga fashion. A more striking reference is also given to the Kangla or Coronation Hall which shows that the front beams of the roof have crossed and carved ends. This is distinctly reminiscent of the houses of Khullakpas of Naga villages. Thus Hodson, rejecting the Hindu Descent view, reached his own conclusion that the people in the plain, the Meeteis (Manipuris) are the descendants of the surrounding hill tribes.¹

Captain Pemberton another British writer closely observed the Non-Aryan Mongoloid features of the Meeteis and repudiated the claim of the Manipuris for a Hindu Descent. For him, the Manipuris are descendants from a Tartar Colony of China.² Instances are however, there for the Mongoloid easterners coming down to this valley. In the prehistoric days also some of Sawang Nonfurels' men (five sons of Yaochik from

1. Ibid., p. 6
2. Ibid.
China) migrated to this land and settled at Susa Kameng. These were the people called Chakpas. They came when the Angoms were reigning in this land. These immigrants did not mix up with the people of this land and remained as Chakpa Lois. Later, many easterners came and settled in this land joining the native population as Nongpok-Haram Yumnaks. In 698 A.D. Samlun, brother of Sukanfa, king of the Pongs, came to this land and stayed for ten years at Apong Ingkhol (to the east of the old palace, Kangla). Then he went back to his country following the Iril river upstream towards the north east.¹ In the year 1250 A.D. the Chinese invaded this land. The Tartar emperor conquered China and Kublai Khan, brother of the Tartar emperor, invaded Manipur. But Meitei king Puranthaba and his men, with advantage on the western bank of the Ningthi river, were waiting for the invading army. The Meiteis defeated the invading Chinese and Tartar army signally. The captives were settled at Susa Kameng with those early chakpas. Some of the survivors went back to their country.² In support of this Sir James Johnstone also wrote, "about the year 1250 A.D. a large Chinese force invaded the country, and was signally defeated: all who were not killed being made prisoners. These taught the Manipuris Silk Culture, and a number of them were settled

1. Khelchandra, Cheitharol Kumbaba, p. 3
2. Singh, R.K. Sanahal, Satjal, p. 58
at Susa Kameng in the valley, where they have still descendants."

Again in 1470 A.D. Choufa Kekhomfa, king of Pong and the Mefteis, king Kyamba jointly invaded Kabo Kyang (now part of Burma). There were interactions of the Mefteis with the Chinese, Tartars and the Pongs from the earliest days. But from these instances, it would not be proper, as Pemberton thought, to assume that the people in this land were descendants from a Tartar colony from China. Many of them in course of time joined the original population known as Mefteis taking their yek with the brand Nongpok-Haram (immigrants who came from the east, but who became the Meeteis).

R. Brown, another British writer, found the origin of the Meeteis to be obscure. Their written records, he observed, had been mostly composed since they became Hindus, and therefore were not worthy of much credit. He writes, "from the most credible traditions the valley appears originally to have been occupied by several tribes, the principal of which were named Khumul, Luang, Moirang, and Meitei, all of whom came from different directions. For a time the Khumul appears to have been the most powerful, and after its declension the Moirang tribe. But by degrees the Meitheis subdued the whole, and the name Meithei has become applicable to all." He was also told about

1. Johnstone, J., Manipur and Naga Hills, p. 80
2. Khelchandra, Cheitharol Kumbaba, p. 9
3. Brown, R., Statistical Account of Manipur, p. 57
the Indo-Aryan origin of the people in this land. But like other British writers, he also had a very poor impression about it. His conclusion is simply that the origin is obscure.

Sir James Johnstone gave a very interesting account of the Manipuris as being a fine stalwart race descended from an Indo-Chinese stock, with some admixture of Aryan blood, derived from the successive waves of Aryan invaders that passed through the valley in pre-historic days. Manipuris have stable and industrious qualities which the Burmese and Shans do not possess. The race has been constantly fed by additions from the various hill tribes surrounding the valley.¹ His view seems to be a consolidation of many other views. That in the Meetei population there are Nongpok Haram yumnaks (Easterners mainly from Pong, Burma and China) and also Nongchup Haram Yumnaks (Westerners mainly from the Indo-Aryan stock) is a fact. The known record Cheitharol Kumbaba and other traditional legends bear evidence to it. The view that the hill tribes from the surrounding hills constantly fed the plain population cannot be ignored in as much as many outstanding personalities of the Meeteis are found to be having hill origin. The only difference which Johnstone has on the issue of the origin of the Meeteis from the traditional account is his silence over the native population who had been living in this land since

¹ Johnstone, Sir James, Manipur and Naga Hills, p. 97
the time when no immigrants had come over here. Thus it is particularly this aspect of the native people that he did not properly look into. Otherwise his view has many elements of truth.

A still interesting account is that of Brian Houston Hodgson who expressed that "in the 'Moitai' of Manipur we have the combined appellations of the Siamese Tai and the Kochin Chinese Moy. In other words, the Manipurian tribe, called Cossiahs by the Bengalese, belongs to the Moi section of the great tribe called Tai by themselves and Shanvel Syan by the Burmese, the sectional name being also foreign and equivalent to the native."¹ As has been stated earlier, the people of this land had close relation with the Shan Kingdom of Pong. But this does not necessarily mean that the people of this land are but descendants from the Shans.

We have seen different accounts of the people in this land from the Manipuri Brahmins, as well as the British writers. The Indo-Aryan Account as given by the Manipuri Brahmins simply speaks about the western immigrants, particularly of the Vedic Aryans in the early days and the Brahmins in the last five centuries. The British accounts, no doubt, gave hints to the solution of the problem, but not the solution itself since they could not get into the details of these people. This was the

period of Hindu zenith in this land. A careful look into the ancient tradition and culture, the traditional legends and sayings, the valued Meitei puyas (left by the great Maichou) would certainly throw sufficient light on the origin of the Meeteis.

As a distinct mark of the relation between the Meeteis in the plain and the Tangkhuls in the north-eastern hills there is the Phumbankaba (ascending the throne) ceremony of the Meitei kings. This practice was followed right from the time of Nongtalai Pakhangba, the first ruler of this land in the historic age till the last king. According to legends Nongtalai is believed to have come down to the valley following the course of the Iril river which has its source in the north eastern hills where the Tangkhuls habitate. Presumably to remember their close relation with the Tangkhuls, the Meitei kings might have used Tangkhul costumes at the time of coronation. So close is the relation that still today a native blanket called Leiroom is a customary presentation by the bride's parents in every Meetei marriage ceremony. Leiroom is a real Tangkhul cloth pattern. Another glaring instance is that of Lai-Haraoba festival in which the divine partner Nonpok Ningthou and Panthoibi should be represented in the form of a Tangkhul youth and girl (somebody should assume the role of a Tangkhul youth and a girl). Further, 'Tangkhul Saram Pakhangba', is an utterance frequently used in the Lai Haraoba. Shri Narendra Singh, with reference to the Lai Khunda and Meihourol Yimbi puvas.
says that Poirei Ningthou Hanba Nganba Khaiyaba Thonga Themfaba (the foremost chief of the Nganbas) had by his wife Khamen Lokpam chanu two sons, Tangkhul and Khaba. This speaks of the close blood relation between the Tangkhuls and the Meeteis.

Still today in a remote Tangkhul village, there was preserved a flag bearing the symbol of the coiling snake (Meetei Royal Symbol). This also signifies the deep relation between the two groups of people. The closeness of the relation is not less with the Kabuis of the west. Lamleksang, brother of Nuncou Yimthangba, the ancestor of the Sarang-Leisangthem, had gone to the hills and settled there permanently. His descendant became the Kabuis in the south western hills. Cultural integration of the Meeteis and the Kabuis has been facilitated by the great contribution of the Kabui Maibas (persons who know the secrets of taming wild evil spirits). In the ancient days Kabui Tomba, a divine personality, tamed the uncontrollable demonical python in the Loktak lake to save the widow and son of his friend. The life of Khamba, the romantic hero of Moirang Kangleilon, was saved by Kabui Salang Maiba. The Kabui Keioiba legend still plays its role in both the Meetei and Kabui society. It is even claimed that Apoinana Maichou, the top Maichou in the time of king Khagemba, because of his name having a Kabui bearing, was a Kabui. With the Analis, the Moyons,

2. Ibid., pp. 42-43
the Monsangs and the Taraos of the south and the south-east. The ancestral goddess Sangku Leima (consort of the most freightful and revered Tutelar deity, Wangbren, of the south) is believed traditionally to be an Anal lady.¹ The Murrings have a close relation with the Khumals, a strong and powerful group of the Megteis. Sembali Mimaba, a Khumal chief, when dethroned by his rivals went to the nearby southern hills. He was sheltered by the Murrings and ultimately he and his descendants became Murrings.² Even the Khongjais who are taken to be hill immigrants, their traditions and culture having a high amount of similarities with the plain tradition and culture, are believed to have been here in the beginning but they had gone to other places in the ancient times. Later, they came back to this land as immigrants having scattered habitations. Their birth ritual, marriage and other ceremonies have great resemblance to those of the plain people.³ Among the hill tribes Chothe-Wainem people used to burn the dead. Thus the other hill tribes, like Kom, Chothe, Koireng, etc. also have very much similar traditions and customs with the Megteis.

The above are few instances of the hill and plain relation. The deeper we go into the traditions and customs of:

1. Ibid., p. 68
2. Ibid., p. 44
3. Ibid., p. 69
both the hills and the plain, the closer will be the relation between the two.

As to how the present hill tribes in different directions had settled in the long past, Shri Bhogeshore Singh and R.K. Sanahal Singh referred to Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi legend. When the flood water in the valley had been drained away by Nongpok through a hole in the southern hills, and the valley became fit for habitation, Nongpok called upon all divine and human beings, who were once in the said valley, to resume their habitation. When all so came up, Nongpok was made king of the land. He nominated eight divine personalities to be Tutelar deities. All beings, human and divine followed the Tutelar deity of their choice in the eight different directions. They went shouting the slogan Hou Hou. It is from this Hou Hou that these people, when settled permanently in the hills of different directions, became known as Haos in the later days.¹ Still to-day, the Tutelar Deities and the heroes who went with the deities, are worshipped with great reverence. According to this account the hillmen of today are none but the descendants of those dedicated ancestors who volunteered for tutelar duties. The Tutelar Deities and the associate groups of people who became hillmen in different directions are shown below:²

¹ Hou Hou signifies the expression of acceptance.
² Singh, O.Bhogeshore, Ningthourol Seireng, pp. 32, 33 and also Singh, R.K. Sanahal, Satjal, pp. 149, 150
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Tutelar Deities</th>
<th>Their associates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. North</td>
<td>Marching</td>
<td>Maos and Marams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. North-East</td>
<td>Chingkhei Ningthou</td>
<td>Tangkhuls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. East</td>
<td>Nongpok Ningthou</td>
<td>Tangkhuls &amp; Murrings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. South East</td>
<td>Irum Ningthou</td>
<td>Murrings &amp; Taraos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. South</td>
<td>Wangbren</td>
<td>Anals, Nanfous, Moyon &amp; Monsangs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. South West</td>
<td>Thangjing</td>
<td>Koirengs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. West</td>
<td>Loiyarakpa</td>
<td>Cheroos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. North West</td>
<td>Koubrui</td>
<td>Kabuis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Later when Nongtalai Pakhangba became king of this land, the descendants of those great ancestors who went with their Tutelar Deities were asked to come down and settle in the plain like their other brothers. But they expressed their happiness to be in the hills for tutelar duties. The following traditional song bears evidence for this.

"Meftei Poirei Laimayol
Kangla Sana Pungmayol
Chingna Koina Pansaba
Laina Koina Pan ngakpa."

The song means: The land of the Mefteis is the heart of the Earth, Kangla (the first dried place) - the golden mount. It is fortified by hills on all sides. The gods are on the surrounding hills protecting it.

But the text of the song had been changed later at the time of Nongtalai Pakhangba as below:

Meidtei Poirei Leimayol  
Kangla Sana Pungmayol  
Chingna Koina Pansaba  
Haona Koina Pan ngakpa.

There is a change in the last line which brings Hao in place of Lai. Haona means the hillmen who are believed to be the descendants of those brave ancestors who went to the hills with the tutelar deities shouting the slogan Hou Hou. The word Hao as used here has a respectable meaning. But in modern days, it carries a meaning indicating tribes in the surrounding hills. This development is due to the conversion of Meeteis to Hinduism that caused the separation of the hill and plain people socially.

What is most fundamental in the close relation between the people in the surrounding hills and those in the plain is their religious and emotional unity found in their traditional belief in the One Supreme Ultimate Father—the Ultimate Source and Background of all things and beings. This Supreme Being has been called by various names in their dialects. It is called Haipou Lagang (the foremost ancestor) by the Kabuis, Arapio (the Ultimate Ancestor of the ancestors) by the Longmeis, Patheng (Real Ultimate Father) by the Khongjais, Kamio Vara Vari (the ever peaceful Ultimate Father who created the Universe) by the Tangkhuls, Asha Paban (the
Heavenly Father) by the Pakhans, Moyons, Monsangs and Analts, Patheng (the Real Ultimate Father) by the Koms and Remts, and Poklen Pokpa Satlen Satpa - Tengbanba Mapu (the Ultimate Ancestor of the Ancestors - The Supreme Lord of the Universe) by the Meeteis. Ancestor-worship presupposes some basis in family and social feeling, some sense of the unity and continuity of the tribes.

Still another social character prevalent in both the hills and the plain is that each tribe is divided into seven units. This bears important significance and suggests the close relation between the hills and the plain. Instances of certain tribes and their constituent units are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the tribe</th>
<th>Constituent units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. The Tangkhuls</td>
<td>Duidang, Sadang, Khapudang, Khadang, Choudang, Sithudang and Kingdang; Saifu, Saichal, Rangla, Rakhou, Seilom, Varing and Khailen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Murrings</td>
<td>Dolla, Raja, Dingthoi, Thoitak, Chongdur, Sampu and Thanga.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The Koirengs</td>
<td>Yoite, Songthu, Leisen, Tutun, Tente, Walba and Mikal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The Manipur Cultural Integration Conference, Ching Amasung Tamgi Mari, pp. 70, 71
Thus, though circumstances make them grow into different tribes and live quite apart from one another, speaking different dialects, they cannot be considered in isolation for they live as members in a harmonious integrated system. The Meeteis believe, as the puyas like Leithak Leikhalon and Wakoklon reveal, that the human species had been created by the divine Ashiba or Sanaahi. The tradition of the Meeteis has it that they are the descendants of the seven sons of Iputhou Pakhangba, the Grand Ancestor, the son of Salailel Sidaba, the Lord of all beings, by Leimalel Sidabi, the Supreme divine mother. The seven sons of Pakhangba were the ancestors of the seven yeks/salais of the Meeteis. The ancient names of the land such as Tilli Koko 'tong Ahanba and Mira Pongthoklam etc. found in the ancient puyas of the Meeteis are all suggestive of the ancient habitation in this land. In Tilli Koko 'tong Ahanba, Tilli means the species of mankind; Koko 'tong means the mount (Atongba) where Til, the Ancestor of mankind, was born; and Ahanba means the foremost. In Mira Pongthok lam also, Mi, Ra

1. Ching Tam Amatani, p. 6
or La, and Pong were expressions signifying mankind of the ancient time; while Thoklam means the place where they used to come out for habitation. At any rate these traditional accounts made the Meeteis firmly convinced that they had a divine origin and had been living in this land right from the ancient days. But these living traditional beliefs of the Meeteis shall have to be assessed properly in the light of modern scientific approaches of historical research and anthropology. In the absence of such an approach the origin of the Meeteis shall remain an obscurity.

In ancient days there was migration of people from this land also. Legends tell us that Mayangs, Takhels, Meirangs, Pashas, Khakis and Erangkas are the descendants of sons of king Kangba.¹ The traditional way of ascertaining whether a group of people is native or migrated is to see if they have stories of migration in their accounts of habitation in this land. Different Puyas refer to a flood when the whole valley was under water. According to the Puya, Koubru Chingeirel, flood water was drained by Khongdeba, son of Koubru, away through a hole in the southern hill at a place called Chingnunghut. People who were engaged in the draining away of water and in constructing streams and rivers in the valley were not regarded as immigrants. They were native people and started settling on dry mounts. The story of

¹. Luwang, N.A., Kangbalon, pp. 8-9
reservation of dry mounts by different groups of original inhabitants is found in the Pung Kanba Puya (Pung = Mount, Kanba = Reservation). As to the ancestors of these people, Krakhong Lamlen Puya says that Lainingthou, the Supreme Lord of the Universe, burst forth into two, just like the bursting forth of the germinating seed. One was Cheng Nganba, the first male; the other was Cheng Nganbi, the first female. Leikei was born of them; Mihinglen Sidaba was born of Leikei; Angang of Mihinglen; Hunganglen of Angang; Tumaringba of Hunganglen; Ngaite, Nate and Nouhingling were born of Tumaringba. They were the seedling of mankind.

There is no doubt that immigrants came to this land both in the prehistoric and in historic days, but they joined the native population of the land as Nongpok Haram (Easterners) and Nongchup Haram (Westerners) people and merged themselves like rivulets flowing down into the main river. There are cultural connections between the Meeteis and the tribes in the hills. But the origins of the Meeteis are obscure in the absence of clear data. The Meetei language belongs to the general Tibeto-Burman group but Grierson doubts about the adequacy of Kuki-Chin to delineate the sub-group to which this language belongs.¹ The culture of the Meeteis is remarkably

¹ Grierson, G.A., Linguistic Survey of India, vol. 3, iii, p. 30
different from that of any of the tribes in and around Manipur. They exhibit a marvellous power of assimilation of diverse features of different tribal cultures while preserving things of artistic and spiritual value in their own culture.