Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The Valley of Manipur, surrounded by ranges of hills, is one of the most beautiful spots and has been variously called 'a lotus on lofty heights' and 'Kashmir of Eastern India'. The country with its charming physical features, its peculiar tradition and history still remains a tourist's paradise. The civilisation here is predominantly rural.¹

Manipur suffers from an isolation, the reasons of which are geographical as well as political. She had her independent status up to 1891. But it does not mean that she was a stranger to Indian culture and civilisation. Her culture has been a part of Indian culture. India sent a band of Brahmans and religious missionaries to Manipur at different times. She accepted aspects of Indian culture and transmitted them to Burma, China and other lands of East Asia. She is the meeting place of the two civilisations of India and Burma.²

On political grounds she can hardly be separated from India. We find the invaders from Cachar, Tripura, etc., during the successive periods of her history. The treaties between Manipur and the East India Company in the 18th and 19th centuries have played an important part in its political history. The

political relation has been further strengthened by the integration of Manipur with India since 1949, till when it enjoyed the status of a Native State.

The culture and civilisation of India which followed in the wake of politics and trade into the State became very important in Manipur. According to some scholars Puranic Hinduism came to Manipur in the 8th century A.D. The official account places the introduction of Vaisnavism into Manipur as an offshoot of all-India movement in the 15th century. In the 18th century she became aware of various sects of Hinduism more specially Vaisnavism of Bengal. Caitanya Vaisnavism worked its way into the atmosphere of a nation. The patrons of Vaisnavism entered into the folklore, art, the temples, the ceremonies of the round of life, marriage, mourning and daily prayers. The collection of sacred texts and the use of Bengali script under the patronage of the kings gave an impetus to Vaisnavism. The cult of kirtan remains vital among the Manipuris. Every house of Manipur claims one or two amongst its members as musicians. The contribution of Manipur to the culture of the world in the realm of dances and polo game is well known. The religious movement of Manipur in the 18th century conveys the spirit of universality and strengthens the bonds of unity. It asserts that Manipur is a part of Bharatavarsa.

It is our purpose to give an account of different schools of Vaisnavism. We shall find out to which school of

Vedanta the Manipuri Vaisnavas belonged in these centuries. There have emerged transformations of Vaisnavism and Saivism in course of their march from their centres to Manipur. By their permutation of local elements, Vaisnavism and Saivism have been able to achieve a distinctive place in the religion of India.  

I. The Geography of Manipur

Manipur which is otherwise known as the land of jewels is situated in the north-western corner of India. It is bounded on the north by the hills of Nagaland, on the west by Cachar, on the south by Lushai hills and Burma and on the east by Burma. To the south-west, north-west and west lies Assam. If we look at the map of India, it is found to lie between 23.50° N and 25.30° N Latitude and 93.10° E and 94.30° E longitude. Topographically it is a part of India covering an area of about 8638 square miles of which 700 square miles constitute the Valley.  

Natural Features

Manipur consists of a central Valley in the midst of hills on its sides. The Imphal Valley is a plateau with an elevation of about 2600 ft. above sea level. The hills of the Valley have different names at different places, of which the most important hills are the Koubru, the Nommaiijing, and the

4. Ibid. infra, Chapters IV and V.

5. Most of the official accounts of Manipur testify to this description of Manipur.
Lāŋgol. The western range of hills bordering on the Valley is called the Loijing with an history of its own. Some of the hills are more than 8000 ft. The hill ranges are characteristically higher on the north than on the south. The Valley slopes down gradually towards the south till it reaches the Loktāk Lake.

The hill-ranges are the offshoots of Himalayas which constitute the northern boundary of India. The highest peak, i.e., Koubru is the lowest point of the Himalayan range, the hill-ranges while proceeding from it diverge to the north of Manipur but completely converge to the south of Manipur. The hill-ranges in the south extend as far as the Mizo Hills and the Arakan Yomas till they meet the Bay of Bengal at Cape Negrais in Burma.

The Loktāk lake with an area of 8.5 sq. miles is a unique feature of the Valley. Its waters shine forth the reflection of the beautiful scenery of landscape. It has grassy meadows full of Kash and Kush reeds which serve as the fodder of animals. There are three island, viz., Thānga, Ithing and Karāng with beautiful gardens. The water of the lake is

6. F. Bowers, The Dance in India, pp.107-109; W. Yumjao Singh, An Early History of Manipur, pp.1-4. There are many books which describe the hills. The hills are dear to the people with innumerable associations of history, epic, songs and religion.
8. Loc.cit.
9. Vide the books on the three islands of Manipur, issued by the Census Deptt. of the Govt. of Manipur, 1965, Imphal. There are other lakes of larger size in the Valley. They retained fresh water throughout the year. They constitute an important feature in the economic and social lives of the people of the Valley.
drained by the rivers of the Valley. There are many rivers which rush on with a great force during the annual rains but remain dry and can be crossed on foot during the dry season.\(^{10}\)

There are two principal rivers, the Imphal and Barak. The Imphal river with its tributaries, the Iril, Nambul, Nambol and Kongba drains the Valley and hill-sides in her rapid course to meet the Chindwin or Irawadi in the Kale Valley of Burma.\(^{11}\)

The Barak river which is called the Gwai or the betel-nut river by the Meitheis flows most of the northern and western hills in its course to Cachar and Surma Valley into the estuary of the Ganges.\(^{12}\)

A geological account of Manipur

Some geologists hold that there was a time where regions now known as Manipur, Cachar, Tripura and Garo hills were once a deep sea. The so-called Pacific-continent which was in the Pacific ocean was submerged on account of some cataclysmic change in the surface of the earth. The lands of Manipur, Cachar, Tripura and Garo hills rose up after the sea disappeared in the remote past. This incident has happened not long before 100 million years. The discovery of various fossil of a cuttlefish, sea animal near Kangpokpi and Imphal-Tamenglong road made the proposition genuine.\(^{13}\)

\(^{10}\) Eye witness.

\(^{11}\) Captain E. W. Dun, *Gazetteer of Manipur* (Section on the rivers); W. Yumjao Singh, op.cit., p.4.

\(^{12}\) Loc.cit.

stories refer to this fact. One theory holds that the origin of Manipur Valley is associated with the Loktak lake which once filled it and has shrunk to its present size in historical times. The Valley is like a trough in shape of which the lake is its deepest part. But Col. Godwin-Austen who visited Manipur with geological knowledge rejected the above theory. R. D. Oldham of the Geological Survey of India supported this view. The silt from the hills used to fill up the lake and the Valley is expanding every year.\textsuperscript{14}

Climate

The Valley of Manipur is air-conditioned by nature throughout the year. The \textit{Topic} of Cancer divides Manipur into two halves. The climate in the Valley is not torrid; because its elevation above the sea-level is great. Along the foothills it gets cooler as one approaches the higher areas but exception is found in Ziribam areas of Manipur in which the climate is hot. It varies with the contour of the land. It stands mid-way between the warm countries, viz. Surma and Brahmaputra Valleys and the hill-towns like Shillong, Sisal etc. The rainfall varies and starts from the middle of April and continues to October.\textsuperscript{15} Even in the rainy season the wind is "Zephyrous and soft". The sun is only "the warmer of

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Captain, E. W. Dun, op.cit., p.2. T. C. Hodson supported this view in his book, \textit{The Meitheis}, pp.3-7; B. C. Allen, \textit{District Gazetteer of Assam}, (Manipur), 1905, p.5.
\item \textsuperscript{15} F. Bowers, op.cit., p.108; Sir James Johnstone, \textit{My experiences in Manipur and Naga Hills}, p.79.
\end{enumerate}
man and the altitude gives the bracing cool which keeps man fresh.

Soil

The country has a rich alluvial soil. She is rich in what heat and moisture can give. The principal products are rice and vegetables. Indigo and tea grow wild. Silk worms thrive. Terrace cultivation is found in the hill areas. It is estimated that the State has fifteen lakhs of bighas (about 5,00000 acres) out of which ten lakhs have been utilised for cultivation of rice, wheat, mustard, maize, potato. Captain B. R. Pemberton writes "... the fertility of the soil is so great that crops generally prove most abundant." 16

Manipur has a rich variety of flora and fauna. The uncultivated parts of the hills and Valley present in their charming jungles bamboos of various kinds, and trees. Beautiful birds which are found at high prices in other parts of India are available in Manipur for little. The forest abounds in tigers, elephants and various types of wild animals. 17

Hill-Routes

The hills are associated with important routes connecting Manipur with the Surma Valley, the Brahmaputra Valley and

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17. Captain E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, pp.2-10; R. K. Sanahal Singh, Glimpse of Manipur, pp.5-6. Books dealing with plants and trees of Manipur are fairly large.
the Kaba Valley. The important southern routes were the Heirok route, Aimon and Maring route. The western routes were the Tongjei Maril, Ngaprum Chingjin and Akhui route. In ancient times the people frequented the journey from the rest of India to Manipur Valley through one of these passes. After staying here as much as they liked, they could reach Kaba Valley via the routes of South-eastern part of Manipur Valley.

Earlier references to Manipur and its civilisation

The escapist interpretation and isolation of Manipuri civilisation and culture are an error repudiated by much of past history, achievement and contemporary accounts. There was a regular trade-route by land from China via Manipur, upper India to Afghanistan and thence to Europe. Col. Gerini in his Researches on Ptolemy's geography says "According to Burmese Royal chronicles (Maharaja Vamsa) Dhajaraja, a king of Sakya race, settled at Manipur, about 550 B.C. and later on conquered, old or upper Pagan". G. E. Harvey in his History of Burma puts the matter in the following manner. "Upper Burma lay inaccessible, true, it was nearer to China which from the second century B.C. used trade routes through Burma." A footnote thereto runs thus, "Two were along the Irrawady and Salwen River, the third down the Chindwin River and through Manipur took Caravans a three months journey to Afghanistan where the

silks of China were exchanged for the gold of Europe. 20 A. Phayre describes the route in his *History of Burma*, "The route by which Kshatriya princes arrived (in Burma) is indicated in the traditions as being through Manipur which lies within the basin of Irawaddy." 21

According to the Chinese texts, the Indian influence exerted since the second century B.C. in the mountainous regions of Upper Valleys of the Chindwin, the Irawady, the Salwen, the Mekong and the Red River as far as Yunnan, which was known by its Indian name, Gandhara. It persists for 13 centuries. There are Chinese names of these several kingdoms. 22 D. G. E. Hall refers to a road connecting Lower Burma with India via the bank of the Irawaddy, the bank of the Chindwin and Manipur. 23 There are four pieces of coins collected by W. Yumjao Singh from which we may draw the trade relationship between Manipur and India in the early period. The account of Hiuen-Tsang and *Kāmakhyā-tantra* contain references to Manipur as a part of Kāmarūpa. 24 From these facts we know that Manipur was an ancient kingdom and there were commercial and cultural contacts between Manipur and Burma, China, etc., through these passes.

**Manipur as described in the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata** Manipur is a part of India both from the point of view of geography and culture. Another problem that naturally arises

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21. Sir A. Phayre, *History of Burma*, p.3. These quotations (fns. 20 and 21) are very interesting indeed.
to us - was it known to the rest of India since the time of the 
Rāmāyana? Is Manipura of the Mahābhārata identical with modern 
Manipur? The name "Manipura" never occurs in the Rāmāyana the 
earliest extant Epic of India. In the Kīśkindhya canto of the 
Vālmīki Rāmāyana there are certain stanzas which may be inter-
preted with some sort of imagination as stating the areas in 
and around Manipur. The direction of the search party of 
monkeys was given by Sugriva with references to Kirātas, the 
inhabitants of Manipur.  

We read in the Bhāgavata-purāṇa the Ādi-parva and 
Āśvamedha parva of the Mahābhārata how Vyās, referred to it in 
yhe Epic. The first is in Ādi Parva on the occasion of 
Arjuna going from Āṅga, Vaṅga and Kaliṅga to see the eastern 
region. In Manipur he approached King Chitravāhana with a 
request for the marriage of Chitrāṅgadā. The proposal prevailed 
on the condition that Chitrāṅgadā's son would be given to Chitra-
vāhana. He was without any male issue to succeed him. Arjuna 
stayed in Manipur for three years and begot a son called 
Vabhrūvāhana who became king of Manipur.  

As regards the Āśvamedha sacrifice, we are told that 
the horse entered Manipur from Sindhu. Arjuna was defeated and 
killed by his son, Vabhrūvāhana. He was restored to life by Ulupi, 

25. L. Ibungohal Singh, op.cit., pp.51-52; Atombapu Sharma, 
27. R. C. Majumdar, op.cit., pp.12, 15; M. Jhulon Singh, 
Bījōv Panchāli, pp.23-25. Poet Tagore has made the marriage of 
Chitrāṅgadā the theme of his play, The Chitrāṅgadā.
the daughter of the Nāga chief, whom Arjuna had married before the marriage of Chitrāngadā.  

Some of the scholars have objected to the claim of Manipur to the alleged connection of Hindu legend and tried to identify the Epic Manipur with a country of the same name situated in another part of India. Scholars like Wilson, Dowson, E.A. Gait, Nandalal Bose, Sibaram Āpte, Cunningham, Rajmohan Nath, etc., hold that the Epic Manipur agrees more with Manipur of other parts of India than with the present one. But in the opinion of Atombapu Sarma and W. Yumjao Singh, the present Manipur is the same as the Epic Manipur. They tried to prove their contention by the help of Philology, and Astronomy. These views are more or less of an antiquarian interest to us. Pertaining to this problem Dr R. C. Majumdar has offered a number of observations in the following manner: 

(iv) There is a living popular tradition in present Manipur that it represents the old kingdom mentioned in the Mahābhārata as the birth place of Chitrāngadā and Vabruvāhana. No such tradition exists in any part of Orissa and no memory of a locality named Manalur (in some manuscripts of the Mahābhārata

28. Meithei Kirtan, pp.80-82; Manipur Itihās, pp.238-269. Both the books are attributed to Atombapu Sarma.


30. See fn.29

31. See fn.29

as well as in the Adiparva the name is written as Manalur instead of Manipur) has survived.\textsuperscript{33} (v) The antiquity of Manipur is proved not only by the variant reading in the Mahābhārata Manuscripts but also by unambiguous references in the Purāṇas. Thus Bhavishya-purāṇa (Brahmakhaṇḍa) mentions it along with Lauhitya, Traipura (Tripura) and Jayanta (Jaintia Hills).\textsuperscript{34}

A brief resume of the views and reasons of the above scholars proves three things - (1) Manipur as a part of India was of immemorial antiquity. The extent of the country is different but the country remains the same.\textsuperscript{35} (2) The route by which Arjuna came to Manipur must be the course of the Surma or Barāk river. This was the only hill-route connecting Manipur Valley with Surma Valley till the opening of the motorable Imphal-Dimapur road in the 20th century. We read of the Brahmans and other immigrants coming in large number for settlement in Manipur in historical times.\textsuperscript{36} (3) If Arjuna returned from Manipur to Hastina and halted at Rajagriha we may infer that Patna and Manipur are on the same latitude.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{33} R. C. Majumdar, op. cit., pp.45-46.

\textsuperscript{34} See fn.33

\textsuperscript{35} My inference from the above discussion.

\textsuperscript{36} The point is largely based on the materials from Bāmon Khuntholon and Takhel Ngamba, MSS.

\textsuperscript{37} R. K. Jhalajit Singh, op. cit., pp.6-8; L. Ibungohal Singh, Introduction to Manipur, pp.5-6. The point is to be decided by the scholars of India.
The different names by which Manipur was known to different people and the origin of the name of Manipur

There are different names commonly used in discussing Manipur by different neighbouring people. To quote W. McCulloch, "The country inhabited by the Muneepoorees is by the Burmas called Kathe, which they equally apply to the people; by the inhabitants of Cachar it is named Moglei; by those of Assam Mekhlee, and by the Shans or those who inhabit the country east of the Ningthee or Khyendwen river it is known as Cassay of which term the Burmese word Kathe is a corruption." 38 The Narrative of Symes and the maps of that period give the name "Cassy" to this country. 39 In Rennell's Memoir and Maps of India it is mentioned as "Mekta". Other popular names by which it is known are Manipur and Meithei Leibāk. The Maññabhāratha, the Bhāgayata-purāṇa and Jaimini's Maññabhārata and Kalidas's work used it by the name of Manipur. The name "Mekhele" as used for Manipur is mentioned in the Maññabhārata and Skanda-purāṇa. This is found in the treaty of King Gourasyam and the British East India Company in 1800 A.D. 40 According to Kalikā-purāṇa it is the place where the waist of Devī fell at the time of Dakṣa-yajñā. 41 Another account declares

38. Col. McCulloch quoted by many writers like W. Yumjao Singh, E. W. Dun, etc.
41. Vide Infra, Chapter VIII, the Thesis (Saktism).
that the outer garment, i.e., Mekhela fell to the ground in her dance in this land. Siva called it "Mekheli".  

Various meanings are given to the word "Manipur". According to Atombapu Sarma Manipur means "naval circle on earth". Another argument is given by some to show that Arjuna was restored to life by the Manī (gem) from the nether world and the land came to be known as Manipur.

Another variation of the same theme is that the Manipur Valley was full of water. Lord Siva, in emulation of a Rāsa style was in search of a place for His divine dance. He, in course of His search, saw this Valley and drained the excess water from it. The Imphal river with its branches, Kongba, Iril, Nambul flows towards the south. Entering into an underground canal the water gets its way out through the three big holes of the mountain "Chingnunghut" and falls into the river Chindwin which flows to the Irawadi in Burma. The work of creation is attributed to Lord Siva. It is suggested that this arrangement cannot be an accident. There are underground and underwater passages, each 64 which has the effect of justifying the legend. According to the will of Viṣnu the beautiful Valley came into

42. See fn.41
43. Atombapu Sarma's works upon which I have freely drawn.
44. R. K. Sanahal Singh, Glimpse of Manipur, p.3.
existence. Various gods and goddesses took part in a dance along with Śiva and Durgā. This is called Lāi-harābā. It is said that Ananta was so enamoured of the dance that he brought the jewels to this country and the land is called Manipur meaning the land of jewels as it is lighted up by the splendour of the excellent gems gracing the hoods. 46

According to T. C. Hodson, the land was at one time Mohendrapura. But subsequently it came to be known as Manipura after Vabruvāhana's coming into possession of the jewel. Another tradition about the name of Manipur makes out that, near Nungoi-bi and between Taibang Thong there is a stone with supernatural power known as Mani or precious stone on account of which the place is known as Manipur. 47

All these divergent accounts are sought to be reconciled by some scholars who hold that the origin of the word, Manipur is different in different centuries. As applied to the thought of the Manipuri Vaisnavas, "Manipur" is to be understood in the third account of the above senses.

46. H. Kulbidhu Singh, Manipuri Dances, p.16; F. Bowers, The Dance in India, pp.109-110. The association of Manipur with the dance is to be found in elaborate detail in Dharani Samhita MS.

47. T. C. Hudson, op.cit., pp.2-5. cf. W. Yumjao Singh's translation of a passage in MS. of Sating Sakok in his R.A.S.M. Bulletin No.1, p.75. In this connection it is to be noted that there are cults devoted to pre-Vaisnavite gods. They do not like the Sanskrit and Bengali name of the country. According to them the name, Manipur became associated with this land since the 18th century. Some of the names found in Meithei MSS. are: Meitrabāk, Kangleipung, Moirāng Pongthoklam etc. By long technical uses, the land protected by the Meithei is called Meithel-leibāk. As we will see later, the term got elaborated and came to mean hills and valley.
Extent of Manipur in the 19th Century and after

The territories of Manipur have fluctuated at various times with the fortunes of their kings. Its present boundaries were determined in the 19th century by the British Government. Disputes often arose in this century as to the extent of Manipur in many directions. It led to warfare and diplomatic crises which brought on the interference of the British. The chronicle gives us some idea of the extent of Manipur and its political status. Instances are on the record that Manipur extended even to the bank of the Brahmaputra river as late as the 15th century. The Manipuri Kings ruled over the Kabā Valley now included in Burma from the 15th century to the 19th century. We know from the 1st clause of the treaty of 1833 that the kingdom of Manipur seems to have extended on the west up to Chandrapur, a part of Cachar. Mahārāja Chandrakīrti added some portion of Lushai Hills to his kingdom. Two stone inscriptions of Saturday, 3, 1872-73 at a place situated at a distance of 100 yards from the Sam-Tui-Nui river records the extent of Manipur in the south.


The eastern boundary of Manipur was diminished by the treaty of 1834. The Kaba Valley was transferred to Burma by the British Government without Manipur being represented in the negotiation. Manipur was given Rs.500/- per month by the British Government. The boundary line between Manipur and Burma was laid down in 1882 A.D. in order to stop the enmity between Manipur and Burma. As for the north, "In 1835 indeed the forest between the Doyeng and Dhunsiri was declared to be the boundary between Manipur and Assam," We have evidence from the treaties that as early as the 19th century A.D. Manipuris were the de-facto master of Naga Hills. Most of the hill villages including Kohima came under the sway of King Gambhir Singh when he reduced them to submission in the Naga Hills operation. His footprints on a stone and inscriptions (with carved figures of dragon insignia) show the nature of authority over the Naga Hills. The British tried to reduce the northern boundary of Manipur by transferring a considerable part of Gambhir Singh's possessions to Naga Hills. Mao became the northern boundary of Manipur since 1842. The king of Manipur was reduced to a figurehead by the British. The eastern boundary of Manipur was diminished by the treaty of 1834. The Kaba Valley was transferred to Burma by the British Government without Manipur being represented in the negotiation. Manipur was given Rs.500/- per month by the British Government. The boundary line between Manipur and Burma was laid down in 1882 A.D. in order to stop the enmity between Manipur and Burma. As for the north, "In 1835 indeed the forest between the Doyeng and Dhunsiri was declared to be the boundary between Manipur and Assam," We have evidence from the treaties that as early as the 19th century A.D. Manipuris were the de-facto master of Naga Hills. Most of the hill villages including Kohima came under the sway of King Gambhir Singh when he reduced them to submission in the Naga Hills operation. His footprints on a stone and inscriptions (with carved figures of dragon insignia) show the nature of authority over the Naga Hills. The British tried to reduce the northern boundary of Manipur by transferring a considerable part of Gambhir Singh's possessions to Naga Hills. Mao became the northern boundary of Manipur since 1842. The king of Manipur was reduced to a figurehead by the British.

54. Vide Political Proceedings, 11th February,1835, No.90; Alexander Mackenzie, op.cit., pp.103-104. We must note the interesting treaties between Manipur and the British which attest the extension of Manipur's boundary towards the north in such places as Patkoi and Barrail ranges, Dhunsiri, etc.
55. See fn.52
56. See fn.55. Possibly these inscriptions have disappeared on account of the lack of attention of the people.
Manipur offered stiff opposition to the British. In 1872-73, Chandrakirti adopted a hostile attitude when the British took steps for the demarcation of boundary between Manipur and Naga Hills. He forbade the Political Agent to enter the eastern portion of the State. The problem continued up to 1877. Soon after the two parties arrived at an understanding. The present boundary was fixed after the Manipuri war of 1891.

II. The People (A)

Besides the above objective physical image, the country signifies also the people, the throbbing life of the nation with character, origin and activities. It has been for centuries the shelter of diverse communities. We can broadly classify the people into four groups, namely, (i) the Manipuris or the Meitheis including the Lois (Scheduled tribe); (ii) the Visnupriyas; (iii) the Hill-men and (iv) the Pangsans (the Manipuri Muslims).

The central Valley is the most fertile and the most thickly populated area. This Valley, on account of its geographical and economic advantage, is inhabited by half the population of Manipur. The Meitheis live mostly in the Valley and in Jiribam in the western limit of Manipur. They have colonies in Assam, West Bengal, U.P., East Pakistan and Burma. The hill regions of Manipur have been the ancestral homes of the hill tribes, viz.,

57. B. C. Allen quoted by J. Roy, op. cit., pp. 110-111. It is to be noted in this connection that Gambhir Singh and Thangal (1770) determined to check the British influence in Naga Hills.

58. L. Ibungohal Singh, op. cit., pp. 3-4. According to the solution of 1877-78 some hill villages near Mao were ceded to Manipur.
the Tankhuls, the Kabuis, etc. The hill-men can be further divided into groups and sub-groups. The Loi people inhabit the different villages of the Valley while the Visñupriyas live in Cachar, Sylhet and Tripura after the war of 1891. Very few of the latter live in Manipur since this war. The Muslims are to be found chiefly on the fertile tracts of land between the Imphal river and the Iril river.

Manipur has a population of 7,80,037 according to the census, conducted in 1961. The average density of population which varies from place to place is 747 per square mile in the Valley whereas it is 33% in the hills. There is 50.4% of females for every 49.6% of males.

The Meitheis constitute the majority of the people. The principal clans (Salãis) that formed the Meithei community are seven in number. They are: Niûthoujã, Angom, Khuman, Moirãng, Luwãng, Chemlei and Khãbã-Ngãnbã. The seven groups carved out their strong-holds in the different regions of the Valley for themselves. Their relation, struggle for supremacy and subsequent fusion in a common race called the Meithei and their extension of arms to the adjoining provinces of Burma, Tripura, Cachar and Naga hills form the history of Manipur.

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Though the seven Salais present a keen contest in the politics of Manipur, we can discern even among them a common origin. There are stories and works which describe the origin of seven Salais from seven planet gods and the identification of seven Gotras with them. They are good stories of Manipuri Hinduism. The story is found in Leithak Leikharon. It describes the seven Salais as coming out of the different parts of the body of Guru. It seems to have been the same as the myth of the creation of four castes, e.g. Brahman, Ksetriya, Vaisya and Sudra. In another story, the ancestors of the seven Salais got the shares of a dead cow assumed by Guru Sidaba Himself. The stories show the organic relation between one clan and another clan.62

In speaking of the Meithei, Col. W. McCulloch, says "Tradition brings the Moirang tribe from the south - the direction of the Kookies, the Koomal from the east - the direction of the Murrings, and the Meithei and the Looang from the northwest the direction of the Koupooees."63 It would be a mistake to attach too much importance to this theory on anthropological and social grounds. His theory does not appear to have much approval. James Johnstone observes in this way "The Manipur's themselves are 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 have passed through the Valley in prehistoric days ... "64 Here also, we can scarcely connect the people of Manipur with other known group of Indo-China in the absence of linguistic and ethnic data. Again B. R. Pemberton contends as follows "We may safely conclude them (Meitheis) to be the descendants from a Tartar colony from China."65 Anthropologists like Denikar do not give any adequate proof as to the settlement of Tartar group in Manipur. No one can prove any direct or inner connection between the Meithei and the Tartars.

Some people trace the Meithei to the Tai branch of the Moi tribe. Brian Houghiton Hodgson gives the following view in a foot-note to the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1823. "In the Moity of Manipur we have the combined appellations of the Siamese Tai and the Kochin-Chinese "Moy". In other words, the Manipurian tribe called Cassaihas by the Bengalis, belong to the Moi section of the great tribe called Tai by themselves and Shan-vel Syam by the Burmese, the sectional name being also foreign and equivalent to the native."66 On historical and linguistic grounds, nothing or next to nothing was yet known of the story and book of migration of the Moi tribe into Manipur. It must be noticed in this connection, that Manipur had cultural contact with the Shans or Pongs of the great Tai family of Indo-China. Kaba Valley was pre-eminantly a land of the Pongs and Kaba (Shan

64. James Johnstone, My Experiences in Manipur and Naga Hills, pp.80-81.
66. J. Rey, History of Manipur, p.4; T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, pp.4-9.
tribes). Manipuri scholars like Atombapu Sarma and W. Yumjao Singh, hold that the origin of the Meitheis can be traced to the Aryans. They are the descendants of the group of people coming from Mithila (Videha) which is the eastern frontier of Aryan culture for a long time. The word Meithel derives its name from Mithila. Atombapu Sarma developed his theory on geographical, astronomical and philological grounds in his writings. W. Yumjao Singh quoted Col. Gerini and Symes extensively in his writings to prove that Manipur was settled by the Aryans in early times. He also holds that Poireiton who came to Manipur in 33 A.D. was an Aryan priest. It is historically recognised that the Aryans were penetrating and establishing themselves in Manipur since the 4th or 8th century A.D. They came as tillers of the soil, propounder of Hindu culture and philosophy from time to time. It may be suggested that the Brāhmans had a great hold on the Meitheis. Hindu jurisprudence had its voice in Manipuri society. They discovered genealogies of the Meitheis people from Nārāyana. The existence of patriarchal and primogeniture system among the Meitheis confirmed this view. We also see the Varna system as providing a clear and definite course which the people followed through life's journey.

Dr George Grierson and S. K. Chatterji hold that the Meitheis are the Kuki-Chin section of the Tibeto-Burman

69. Vide infra, Chapter III.
stock. They appear to have scattered over the hill areas from Lushai hills and Chittagong. They have their kinsmen in Burma. To quote S. K. Chatterji "Situated between India and Burma and forming an intermediate Tibeto-Chinese group between the Tibeto-Burman peoples of Assam and North Bengal on the one hand and the Burma on the other, the people of Manipur were at crossways: but they elected to fall in line with the Hindu people of India.\(^{70}\) Upendranath Guha said that Manipur in ancient times was under water. When the water became dry on account of the earth from the hill, five islands came into existence. Repous offenders were deported to them by the kings of Kāmarūp. According to him there was close relation between Manipur and the Naga tribe.\(^{71}\)

But in recent times this view has been challenged by some scholars who hold that there is a gulf of difference between the Meithei people and the Kuki-Chin group. The institution of the marriage of the Meithei people is very different from the people of the Himalayan region. The similarity of language is not a sufficient test of a race.\(^{72}\)

None of these views is adequate. The mass of people in Manipur is a composite one to which the Dravidians, Mongolians, Aryans, Pongs, Chinese, Siamese, etc., were contributory.

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It is to be noted that the African Negroes speak English language.
F. Bowers observes "... ... racially, the Manipuri is a deeply mixed ethnic group. West has mixed with East and North with South. Chinese have blended with Aryans, Mongolians with Dravidians. This mixture creates the "pure" Manipuri, called Meithei, who live in the valley and number 400,000 of the total population of 60,000. The balance constitutes the racially purer but artistically inferior hill tribes who live in the mountains and who are greatly looked down upon by the highly civilized Meitheis. Amid head hunters, aborigines and predatory and warring neighbors, Manipur is an oasis of civilisation."  

It may not be out of place to mention the physionomy of the Meitheis. From their general appearance they seem to be Mongolian race. The hair is long, black and straight in most cases. Brunets are as common as blonds. They are different from the Chinese or Japanese in complexion. They are well built, healthy and sturdy. The stature of Manipuris deteriorated, of late, on account of sedentary habits and poor diet. In the period under study, instances are on the record that fat people are rare and so are maimed persons. The average height of a man varies from 5 feet to 5 feet and 6 inches. The height for a woman is 4 feet with some exception.  

The Mongolian feature is predominant in Manipur. It is also certain that there has been a large infusion of Aryans

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73. F. Bowers, *The Dance in India*, p.108.  
among them. There are some predominantly of Aryan. We have adverted the arguments in the previous paragraph. We may cite the following account from Dr R. Brown: "Although the general facial characteristics of the Manipurie (Manipuri) are of the Mongolian type, there is great diversity of feature among them, some of them showing a regularity approaching the Aryan type. Among both men and women the stature is very various, differing about as much as is found among Europeans." 76

Captain E. W. Dun gives the same view: "There can be no reasonable doubt that a great Aryan wave of very pure blood passed through Manipur into Burma in pre-historic times. I see traces of this in the feinly cut features seen now and then among the Manipuris." 77

The people comprise both the original people (non-Aryan races) and the immigrants, i.e., the Aryans, the Shans, etc. The history of Manipur witnessed the process of racial fusion undermining the geographical features. 78

The process of coming immigrants from the rest of India and the cultural integration of Manipur with the Indians is not yet complete. This is particularly evident in the eastern parts of India where a number of Naga, Kuki and the hill tribes were unaffected by Aryan culture. In Manipur, the

77. E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, p.15, fn.
78. See the above paragraphs.
process of absorption and integration was in full swing in the 19th century. It is still continuing. It swept over the Valley of Manipur under the Vaisnava kings of Manipur.\textsuperscript{79}

The immigrants are part and parcel of the Manipuris. They were also warriors who had shed enough of their blood in defence of freedom of the country. The immigrants from the rest of India have the singular merit of being a contributor to the cultural and literary side of Manipur. The 4th century A.D. evidently saw the movement of Brāhmaṇ immigrants though they were absorbed in the Meithei population.\textsuperscript{80}

It has been already stated that the people from the East with Mongolian blood came to Manipur in different periods of history. They were the Shans (Kabaws and Pongs), a little of Chinese and Burmese. Some of them were incorporated in the population of Manipur. Later they were brought as captives or otherwise.

There are important documents for the historical study of the immigrants. The people coming from the East were called Nongpok Hāram. The people coming from the West were called Nongchup Hāram.\textsuperscript{81} The account of the coming of the Brāhmaṇs as early as the 15th century is contained in a book, called Bāmon Khunthoklon.\textsuperscript{82} The Brāhmaṇs who came to Manipur before

\begin{itemize}
\item 79. R. C. Majumdar, \textit{The Aryan Expansion in North-Eastern India}, pp.50-51.
\item 80. S. K. Chatterji, \textit{Religious and Cultural Integration of India}, p.28.
\item 82. Bāmon Khunthoklon MS; L. Ibungohal Singh, op.cit., pp.199-200.
\end{itemize}
the 15th century (i.e., before or at the 14th century) could not introduce caste system in Manipur. As a matter of fact, many Brāhmans have been remaining in Manipur in the social history of Manipur. Some people do not belong to any of the social class. They are the Ksetrimayums, Arāmbams, etc.

Some books such as the Ksetrilon, Lāirikvengbamlon, etc., deal with the coming of these families whose numerical strengths are not very considerable.

The history of Burma clearly gives the migration of the people from Burma to Manipur and vice versa. The migration of the people from the east ended with the reign of King Mo\textit{m}yāmba (1562-1597). 84

Marriage alliance between the Meitheis and the hill tribes of Manipur is very usual in ancient times. Some of the Nagas were coming within the fold of the Meitheis. 85

The surrounding and circumstances played an important part in determining the ethnic difference of the people. There was no clear cut division of the hill people and plain people as the ancient books tell us a mixing of them alike. Some of the people who came with Peireiton became the Hāo (hillmen). 86


85. N. Khelchandra Singh, "Manipurgi Ching Tamda Leiba Migi Mari" Conference on Cultural Integration of Manipur, 1968, pp.1g-5g.

The Development of the Ideal of "Meithei"

Though the term "Meithei" meant at first (i.e., 33 A.D.) and literally the people of the Nimthouja clan who entered Manipur and some of whom developed the Nimthouja dialect and had also an early racial significance, it comes to be known as the whole people's culture. The Nimthoujas subdued other clans and annexed their principalities to them through these centuries. The conception of the term was extended to the people of seven clans. The matrimonial alliances among them was a constant feature. In the present context, it means a person belonging to one of the seven clans, i.e., Moirãngs — who is as much a Meithei as a man of Nimthouja. In the later age, we use the term with a wider connotation. It is used as a synonym for the combination of the people of the seven clans and arrivals from the east and the west. Using the term in this sense, we may apply this term to Ksetrimayums, the Laikyengbams and the Brâhmans. They do not belong to any of the clans. They are treated as equal in political status and culture, as having the epithet "Meithei" in their names. When the people arrived in Manipur in the earlier times, they were absorbed in the local population through a process of Meitheinisation. Salãis (Clans) were assigned to them during the reigns.


90. See fns. 88 and 89.
of King Nāophāmbara (428-518 A.D.) we may apply this term to the
Lois (Schedule castes), Muslims and the Nagas who are found in
Manipur. 91

According to the technical usage of more than 2000
years, the people of one Salāi (say Khuman) is strictly a
Meithei. So is the case with a Brāhmaṇ. Truely speaking, there
is no Khuman race and no Meirāng race at present but the clan
names are used in ritualistic and cultural context. 92

There is a class of people in Manipur known as Loī.
They are the backward or scheduled caste who constitute the
degraded section of the society. They are divided into a num-
ber of sections, viz., Phayeng, Kameng, Andro, Sugnu, Chakpa,
etc. The Hāris or Yāithibis are regarded as even more unclean
than the above named group. The villages inhabited by them are
named after the name of the caste. They eat pigs, fowls, and
hens, and indulge freely in liquors. They have different occupa-
tions. They specialised in wine manufacturing, silk making,
salt manufacturing, pottery making, etc. Most of them have taken
to cultivation. 93

Their degradation in the social status is not due to
their occupation but to their mode of eating, living and clothing.
Their pronunciation is a little different from the Meithels.
According to one theory, they are the descendants of Moirāng

91. See fns. 88 and 89.
92. T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, pp.109-110 (section on
sacrifice).
tribe which settled in the south. They were at first independent but were subdued long ago. They have been regarded as a Loi or subdued section rather than a pure Meithei. In ancient times, persons of bad character who were condemned by the kings were deported to the different Loi villages. There is another class of Loi known as Loi by purchase which means a person who becomes a Loi by his voluntary will.

Among the Ksatriyas there is a community known as Visnupriya Manipuris. They are more dark-skinned than the pure Meitheis. There are some theories about their origin. According to B. C. Allen, they are the descendants of 120 Hindu families of different castes who came to Manipur during the time of Garibnawaz in the latter half of the 18th century. The king of Manipur asked them to teach the Hindu customs and manners to the people. According to another view, they are the first ruling race and the Meitheis are the next immigrants. They have developed a dialect called the Khalachaxi (Visnupriya) which is different from Manipuri. It is allied to the Kamarupi tongue. According to R. M. Nath they came from Kamarupa to Manipur during the reign of King Khomtekcā in the 8th century. They established their Head-quarter at Visnupur which means a place where Viṣṇu resides. Another view says that they came from Lakhimpur.

96. Cited to me by Amakchamba Pandit when I discussed the matter with him. See also fn. 95.
99. See fn. 98; R. M. Nath, op.cit., pp.82-90.
with a stone image of Visnu and halted at Viśnupur at first after descending from the Laimatol range. They came to be known as Viśnupriyas since then. They are found chiefly in Mayāng Imphal, Nāchou, Ngaikhong Khunou, Wāngjing, and Heirok. Their head-quarter is at Ningthoukhong.

The Manipuri Muslims began to live in Manipur since 1606. They were brought as war captives by Khāgemba from Sylhet and Cachar. The Manipuri word for Muslim is 'Pāngan' which comes from the word 'Bengal'. The Manipuris corrupted the word Bāngal into 'Pāngan'. Their numerical strength is small. There are fourteen family-names with Manipuri ending. They have among them the Pathans and Mughals. They adhere to the Islamic culture in dress, customs, eating and family arrangements.

In the Hills there are a number of Naga and Kuki tribes whose origins are shrouded in mystery. The elder tribe is the Naga with its sub-classes such as the Kabuis, Tangkhuls, the Marings, the Mao, the Maram, etc. The Kuki group with its sub-tribes such as the Kems, Thadois, Gangtes, Paites, Hmars, etc.

100. R. M. Nath, Back ground of Assamese Culture, Shillong, 1948, p.83.
101. E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, Section on the people (Viśnupriyas).
103. See fn. 102.
migrated into Manipur during the 19th century from the neighbouring lands like Lushai Hills.\textsuperscript{105} The Tangkhuls have a good complexion. They have a fine cut feature usually with a straight and slightly pointed nose. Their height is tall and the skin is thin.\textsuperscript{106} They are found in Ukhrul and Phaisat areas. The Kolyas are known as Khoiru by the Manipuris. It has sub-divisions. The Maos and Marams are considered the most important of them. The Maos are brown-skinned and hard working. They are shorter than the Tangkhuls. The Maos are found in the northern hills of Manipur. The Marams are much the same as the Maos. They are found in the hill ranges to the south of the Mao hills.\textsuperscript{107} The Kabuis stand most conspicuous in the creation story, folk tales and legends of Manipur. They are notable for their dance.\textsuperscript{108} Some scholars hold that they lived in the hills from Tamenglong and Aimol to Khoupum Valley, from whence they professed to have migrated to some parts of the Valley including the Imphal town where they are found. They are short statured like the Mongolian people.\textsuperscript{109} The Marings are the inhabitants of a place now included in the Manipur side of the present Indo-Burma border. They are dark-skinned. They are

\textsuperscript{105} See infra, Ch.II (Reigns of Narsingh and Chandrakirti)
\textsuperscript{106} Mrs Ethel Grimwood, \textit{My Three Years in Manipur}, p.17; R. K. Jhalajit Singh, op.cit., p.17; E. W. Dun, op.cit., Section on the Hill Tribes.
\textsuperscript{108} Cited to me by M. Chandra Singh, an authority on the composite culture of Manipur. Also, Faubion Bowers, \textit{The Dance in India}, pp.165-166.
\textsuperscript{109} R. K. Jhalajit Singh, \textit{A Short History of Manipur}, p.17; Ethel Grimwood, \textit{My Three Years in Manipur}, p.16.
different from other Naga tribes by their long hair and mode of hair dressing. Some of the Marings have come from Mangsa in the Kabaw Valley, while some from Angoching near the Kabaw Valley. They are found in Heirok. It is maintained by some that they have been at one time in Haobam Marak in Imphal (at Moirangkhom near the Manipur Secretariat) before their migration to the present place.

The Kuki tribes migrated from the southern part of the Lushai Hills into Manipur in the latter part of the 19th century. They are wandering tribes consisting of two main groups, i.e., old and new. The Kukis are linguistically and culturally related to the Lushai people of Assam. Of late, the Paite, Sokte, Ralte and Gangte, came and settled in Manipur. They live, in the South-western hills of Manipur.

Our appraisal of the hill tribes and their contribution to the culture of Manipur is that they are fearless, simple and delightful. They have been of sturdy patriotism. Some of them adopted the Meithei habits and customs and lived on lines of friendship with the Meitheis. Their aesthetic senses as expressed in dance, music, arts and crafts cannot be neglected.

112. E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, Section on the Hill Tribes of Manipur.
114. R. K. Jhalajit Singh, A Short History of Manipur, pp. 17, 117 & 139. The materials are taken from the Cheitharol Kumbada.
Their association with the Meitheis is good. There have been invasions of Manipur from Cachar and Tripura since 1324 A.D.\textsuperscript{115} The Manipuris called the people of these regions as Maxifl€i e, a term which is frequently used in the chronicle. The descendants of these people were absorbed into the Meitei community up to 1891. After this, they have separate identity and added an element to the population of the country.\textsuperscript{116}

Meithei Language and Literature (B)

The Meithei language became a spoken one since the heyday of Manipuri culture. Meithei language is different from neighbouring languages - the Burmese, the Assamese and the Bengalis. A problem over which opinion is sharply divided among the scholars is the origin of Meithei language. Dr George Grierson in his Linguistic Survey of India, Volume III, Part III holds that Meithei with its considerable old literature is affiliated to the Kuki-Chin group of the Burmese branch of the Tibeto-Burman family. S. K. Chatterji supports this view in his monograph, "Kirata-jana-Krtfi". The reason they adduce for this view is that Meithei is an important link between Tibetan and Burmese, Bora and Dimsa, as two Sino-Tibetan tribal languages of Assam, present an affinity with Meithei both from the view point of grammar and vocabulary.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{115} CK, p.8; W. Yumjaog Singh, An Early History of Manipur, pp.158–159; See infra, Ch.III.


The above views have been challenged by Dalton and oriental scholars like Atombapu Sarma and W. Yumjao Singh. They have shown that Meitheli or Manipuri Language is derived from Sanskrit language and its grammar is based on Sanskrit grammar. In the field of linguistics they have established the similarity between not only grammatical inflections, case suffixes, roots but between colloquial Sanskrit and Manipuri words. Sanskrit and Manipuri myth and legend followed the same theme. Manipuri language with its script contains maximum number of words of Sanskrit origin.

Here are some words which are derived from Sanskrit in spite of phonetic modifications, viz., Surendra = Surapati Soraren, Mata = Ima, Dwarka = Tharka = Thanga (island), Karna = Nakong, Na ear (by a process of transformation and contraction), Khaba = Khanda, Chala = Chatlo ... Such similarities abound in their works. 118

Sanskrit has contributed to and enriched the vocabulary and grammar of Manipuri literature after the coming of the people from the rest of India in large numbers. The construction of Manipuri grammar on the model of Sanskrit is the great achievement of Manipuri Brāhmans. To say that the earliest form of Meitheli language has developed out of Sanskrit is a hypothesis which at the moment cannot be proved or disproved. 119


119. See fn. 118. The culture of Manipur cannot be properly assessed without reference to Sanskrit.
The literature found in the rural areas is different from the Sanskritised written literature. There are certain folk words which cannot be spelt in Bengali or Sanskrit letters. The moment we take away the Sanskritic paint from its orthography, we shall see the Manipuri language in its true colour.  

Manipur is a land of many tribes having different dialects, taste, religious beliefs and culture. Manipur was a land over which both traders and armies passed. Sometimes it was the Tekhāos, the Cacharies, at other times the Burmese or Chinese. With such influences at work, we can trace the tribal, the Burmese and the Shan elements in Manipuri language. The language has a vitality and elasticity. It is elastic enough to embrace new words and terms. It is growing as a language and as a vehicle of noble thought that the people can realise. One of the most striking things about it is that the words that belong to the primary group; words that were used in the early days of social evolution, words about family relations and immediate society, proverbs, measurements of necessary things of space and time struck root in the Manipuri soil. The old words and loan words flourished alongside of each other for centuries.

121. M. Jhulon Singh, (Manipuri) Sāhitya Itihās, pp. 73-75.
122. M. Kirti Singh, "Manipuri Language and Script", Souvenir, issued by Manipur Nāhārol Sahitya Sahā, Imphal, 1970, pp. 1-3; The English system of timing, i.e., second, minute, hour, etc., was introduced in Manipur during the reign of King Narsingh. Since then, the English system became widely used in Manipur, Cheithārol Kumbābā, p. 248.
Early Literature

We may distinguish between three stages with its special characteristics in the development of Manipuri language:

(a) Early period in which the literature appears from the very beginning till the end of the 17th century, (b) The Vaiśṇava literature in which we see the development of Sanskrit and Bengali works under the patronage of Vaiśṇava kings. It lasted from Charāirongbā (1698-1709) to 1891 and (c) the modern period in which we see the rising and flourishing of English literature. It lasted from 1891 onwards.123

In the Manipuri tradition, the origin of its literature is treated as of unknown antiquity. The date of archaic Manipuri, of which the modern Manipuri is an offshoot, goes back according to W. Yumjao Singh to about 3400 years ago or to the age of the Epic. While spoken language occurred very early, it was in 33 A.D. that written language really began among the clans of Manipur, specially among the Luwāngs, the Angoms, the Khumans and the Moirāngs. In 33 A.D., the Niāthomjā principality under Fākhāṁbā with its settled condition did provide a favourable atmosphere for the development of dialect and literature.124 Other events like agriculture and pottery as practiced by other clans, i.e., the Luwāngs, the Angoms, the Khumans and Moirāngs were powerful aids to such an advance in literature.

In the struggle for supremacy among the principalities the Nimthoujā came out triumphant and absorbed other principalities. The Nimthoujā dialect became the predominant language of Imphal Valley. In the process of integration, it embraced words from the clans of the Valley as well as from the hills. The Nimthoujā language promised to be a great force bringing about cooperation and solidarity among the people. The Nimthoujā or the Meithei is so common that it is used a synonym for the language of Manipur by long technical usage.125

Meithei has a script of its own called Meithei Mayek (Manipuri alphabet). The script is the cherished contribution of the Meithei to the culture and brotherhood of Sino-Tibetan group. The Austrotribal language of Assam did not adopt its script. The script is written from left to right - a feature which is found in Brahmi script. In his Linguistic Survey of India, Vol.III, Part III on p.22, perhaps the most stimulating book on script, Dr. Grierson gave the specimen of Manipuri alphabet. Scholars have agreed as to its affinity with Devanāgari.126

125. The scheduled castes, i.e., Lois (the Andro, Khurkhul, Kameng etc.) have different types of dialects which were spoken by them. T.C. Hodson holds that these dialects do not fall under the category of Kuki-Chin group. They fall under a separate category. The research into this problem has not been taken so far. Now the different dialects are not in use. Vide T.C. Hodson, The Meitheis, pp.8-9.

126. There are unavoidable divergences of opinion real or apparent in matters of origin, nature and number of Meithei script. It has been assigned by G. H. Damant to 1700 A.D. According to him, it follows the model of Bengali alphabet. T.C. Hodson thinks that the script may come down to 1540 A.D. The art of writing was acquired by the Meitheis from the Chinese who came to Manipur about 1540 during the reign of Khāgemba. The Cheitharol Kumbāba informs us that King Khāgemba introduced the
The books written in Meithei script reveal that literature was at first oral as it was transmitted in this way before the use of writing. Examples of oral literature have persisted down to the first century A.D. Manuscript such as Lāṣai Śraphām and singing of a song called, Oungri are the instances in point. Lāisra was the queen of Pākhāmbā, the king who reigned in the Nāmithoujā clan in the second quarter of the first century A.D.

Eighth Century Copper-plates

A specimen of early literature seems to have dawned in the 8th century A.D. The copper-plates dated Saka 721 are issued by King Khomtekca who ruled Manipur from 763 A.D. to 773 A.D. Reference to the worship of Hari, Śiva and Devī are found particularly in the inscriptions but this material is art of writing the Meithei script in Manipur. The pandits of Manipur have fixed for its origin a date anterior to that of Khagemba on the authority of the stone inscription at Kholbu (issued by King Kayamba 1467-1508) and copper plate inscription (8th century A.D.). Dr Kalidas Nag is of the opinion that it must have been prior to the time of Asoka the Great.

The number of letters was 18 including the unpronounced and unused letter Ānji. By the time of King Jayasimha, the number had risen to 35. It is similar to Brahmi script in appearance, style and mode of writing the zero. Some of the letters like Anji, Kā, Mā, etc., are found associated with Tantricism. Vide, G. A. Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, Vol.III, Part III, 1904, p.21; T. C. Hodson, op.cit., pp.156-177; N. Khelchandra Singh, Aribā Manipuri Sahitya Itihās, pp.26-30.

127. See fn. 124.
rather obscure for treating it as a piece of beautiful literature. From the writer's viewpoint, it is generally held to be a piece of prose literature. It is written in Manipuri prose and Manipuri script.

Extensive Literature

Early Manipuri literature has developed richly on so many subjects, (i) the historical (ii) poetical (iii) philosophical (iv) religious (v) astrological and (vi) apocalyptic group. There are some books which do not fall under these categories. Many works have been written on them by a rare galaxy of masters of culture. They are still found preserved in the palace and as such, they throw light on the literature of Manipur. We give some representative books of early period that had come down to us.

Ceithãrol Kumbãbã

Kumbãbã is the court chronicle. The meaning of the word means the account of years. It sets out briefly in a solemn diction, the reign of kings since 33 A.D., important events, eclipses of the sun, moon, earthquakes, epidemics, etc. The actual keeping of it was a familiar one to the king since the fifth century A.D. Special kind of development was made in the 15th and 16th centuries.\(^{128}\)

\(^{128}\) Vide, infra, Ch.VI (Vaisnava Literature); Cheithãrol Kumbãbã is edited by L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Kheichandra Singh. It is published by MSP in 1967.
Nuittit Kappa (the shooting of the sun)

This is an allegorical work which gives an account of the shooting of the Sun by a man called Khwai Nongjengba Piba. This scene when interpreted would mean that Khwai Nongjengba Piba experienced enormous difficulties in serving two brothers of the Angom clan who ruled in the central portion of Manipur Valley. The two brothers are spoken of as two Suns in the book. In order to find relief and release from their tyranny Nongjengba Piba killed one of them and overawed another. The simple yet unsettled political condition before the accession of Pakhamba is emphasised here. The full text of the whole book have already been rendered into English by T. C. Hodson in The Meithei.

In the end of the book, we find a collection of hymns to the Sun by the different clans of Manipur Valley. 129

Poireitok Khunthokpā

The book is supposed to have been written in the third century A.D. The anthropological aspect of ancient Manipur has been set out in it. The words written in archaic Manipuri had to be construed in the allegorical sense. The real fact underlying the ostensible meaning describes how Poireiton and his horde including men, women and children colonised the area.

between the Langol hill and the Koubru hill and brought the primitive people within the pale of civilisation.  

By the time of migration of Poireiton, the people were able to use seeds of plants, different kinds of rice and follow occupations. They were indebted to Poireiton.

Khomjom nubi Nungaron

Khomjom Nubi Nungaron written sometime after Poireiton Khunthokpa narrates two legends. The first legend is said to narrate how the six girls of Luwangs family and their lovers became the six pleiads and orions in the sky by the wish of Soraren, the king of gods. The second legend shows how an unfortunate lady named Haosi Namoinu who received sorrows in the hand of her stepmother was transformed into a cricket by the gods. We are struck immediately by the similarity between this story and the tale of Tejimala.

It has been said by all that the book contains some of the guide-words of Sanskrit, viz., Ksatriya, Sumeru, etc. and

130. W. Yumjao Singh, An Early History of Manipur, Imphal, 1967, Ch.VI, pp.99-109. This view is controverted by Pandit M. Chandra Singh on the ground that the land was already civilised before the coming of Poireiton. He quoted some passages from the original MS to support his contention. Khonthang, December issue of 1969.

Burmese (Ngà) and Siamese words like Phurà. Sentences are short but not extremely short.\textsuperscript{132}

\textbf{Numban Pombi Luwāobā}

Numbān Pombi Luwāobā is a well-known mythological hero of early literature and a number of stories have associated with him in different \textit{Purāṇas} (\textit{Puvās}).

He was the son of Luwāng Kumthibā. He married a beautiful maiden of celestial bearing called Kaubru Nāmoinu. She died prematurely. He loved her with all his heart. He made a terrible vow that he would not perform the funeral rites. So the chance of her coming to life was open. Since he broke all the laws of god and man. Leimung Thongāren, the god of death sent his two brothers to fight Pombi Luwāobā. Being a strong man he defeated them (emissaries of death) and put them in a dungeon. The time for the return of the soul to the place of death being postponed, the god of death himself came. The hero asked for the favour of the restoration of Nāmoinu’s life with devotion. This was granted by the loving god. It conveys the moral lesson that even death has no power to part the lovers.\textsuperscript{133}

We find an interesting parallel of the story in the story of Savitri and Satyabha and also in Orpheus and

\textsuperscript{132} See fn. 131. We have come across the words in course of reading the book.

\textsuperscript{133} O. Bhogeswar Singh, Ningthourol Seireng, Part I, pp.147-163; R. K. Jhalajit Singh, "A brief survey of Ancient Manipur", Manipuri Language and Literature, 1969. cf. Some hold that this work was written in the 18th century.
Eurydice. The points of difference that interest us in this connection is that in the story of Sabitri, the restoration of life depends on her devotion while in Manipur it relies on the strength of the hero. In Greek story we find the importance of music as necessary for the restoration of Eurydice's life.\footnote{134}

\textbf{Chainaron}

The Manipuri life is regulated by its distinctive code and usage. The description of chivalry and fighting is embodied in a book called \textit{Chainaron}, said to have been written in about the time of Thāwañ Thābā (1195-1231). We are told in it that the right of private vengeance was accepted within some limits. If two heroes quarrelled they would fight to the death privately or in the presence of the king and nobles. Appeal to arms was an ordeal to test the innocence of the parties. We can find adequate examples both in people and in many races of ancient age. Some of the stories are credible in the ancient code. The book remains a specimen of rare literature. It is of special interest to those who have a keen interest in the use of weapon and deadly fightings.

Also, we note that much of the force of Manipuri construction is seen in the stark simplicity of the words used. Many of the descriptions well illustrate this point.\footnote{135}

\footnote{134. See fn. 133.}

\footnote{135. N. Khelchandra Singh, (Ed), \textit{Chainaron}, Imphal, 1968; My reference is to the whole book of this edition.}
Loyumbā Silen

The well-known text book on distribution of labour called 'Loyumba Silen' has survived from the time of Loiyamba (1074-1122 A.D.). It gives a lengthy discussion on the particular occupation for every family. According to Loiyamba's mandate, the king, the queen and the nobles have their own code of conduct appropriate to their station in life. The rights and duties of a noble are those of an ordinary subject. It was in fact the traditional order of Manipuri society, a society which by the help of it formed a homogenous polity in spite of the diverse ethnic and social groups of all ages and characters. Within its frame work, the Manipuris maintain their civilisation and protect the country from external aggression and terrible anarchy. In ancient and medieval Manipur, the people followed it in its completeness. Akin to but different from this, is a book called Masin which is otherwise known as Loina Silen.

We have also original manuscripts dealing with the genealogical trees of different families of different clans. Traditions, folk tales and proverbs survived the predominance of Bengali and Sanskrit. The Meitheli literature is valuable from the point of view of philology and history as we have books of this time.

Manipuri or Meitheli language has been the state language at least from about the third century A.D. It had been a

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136. See fn. 133.
137. See fns. 133 & 124.
policy of the kings to adopt its language and script in striking coins, recording inscriptions, and recording chronicles. It is rich in philosophical and military terms. Many songs and stories have been preserved through it. Serious attempts were made to develop this language by the kings. But they did not adopt it in their relations with the East India Company. The English versions of the treaties of 1762, 1833 and 1834 were found.138

When we come to 1891, we find that the orders of the Government of India were translated into Manipuri. Even after this, it continued to be the state language of Manipur. It is recognised in the deliberations of the Durbar (the Highest Executive, Judiciary and Legislative Body) and the judgements of the law courts. After 1947, there has been a growing interest in it among the people of Manipur. It is very much alive as a developed language in the educational systems of the Government.138

III. Political History till the end of the 17th century

The early political history of Manipur is shrouded in considerable mystery. The Mahabharata episode tells us that the history of Manipur is of great antiquity. But, as a matter


139. See fn. 138.
of fact, no kings and their dynasty before the first century are untraceable from the historical point of view. From the study of the ancient script, exploration of the sites of ancient settlements and examinations of materials the pandits can construct an account of early history. The Cheithārol Kumbābā gives us a list of more than 48 rulers who were said to have ruled from the 1st century to the 8th century. The Valley was parcelled out among the local chiefs of whom Salās attained an uneasy prominence, in different parts of the Valley. Out of them the Meitheis rose into prominence in the 1st century A.D. The chronicles of the Nimthoujā clan are useful for the history of Manipur. Several varieties of coins circulated by Pākhāmbā, Marānba (1256 A.D.), Khāgemba (1597), Pālkhombā (1666), and Charāiroṅgā (1697) have been found in Manipur. Stone images, stone tablets, inscriptions and available manuscripts form trustworthy source of history.

Pākhāmbā and His Ten Successors (33-663)

Pākhāmbā, the first king known to history became the king of Manipur in 33 A.D. He was successful in maintaining a sound administrative system in the Valley. The Manipuri Purānas say that he was divine by day and human by night, the

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2. My inference from the said chronicle.


reason being that he administered divine justice like a god in the day and like an ordinary human being he spent the night with his family members and kith and kin. The dynasty founded by him is known as the Nimthouā and his descendants in the male line ruled Manipur till this day. He was succeeded by Khuyoi Tompok in 154 A.D. who made an experiment in making a drum of deer's skin. His son, Tāothimānāang succeeded him in 264 A.D. His most important work was the dredging of all the rivers of the Valley. He prevented Manipur from being reduced to an arid desert by draining the excess water through the rivers. He was practical enough for not reducing the level of the Loktāk lake by draining away too much water through the channel connecting the lake with the Imphal river. Cheitharol Kumbābā records that he and his brother Yoimomāa conquered a hill village, i.e., Lokhā Hāokhā (about 40 miles to the south of Imphal). Khui Mingonbā ascended the throne in 364 A.D.

According to the chronicle he introduced the present mode of house building in Manipur. He was succeeded by Pemsibā in 379 A.D. He entered into matrimonial alliance with the chief

8. R. K. Jhalajit Singh, op.cit., pp.43-44. A rare MS called Tutenglong or Tudouron describes the occurrence of a flood and strenuous efforts made by them for controlling it.
10. T. C. Hodson, op.cit., (Sec. on Housing); O. Bhogeswar Singh, Ninethourol Shiring, Part I, 1966, pp.220-221.
of Khuman principality by marrying his daughter. He was succeeded by Kaokhamba in 394 A.D. who was succeeded by his younger brother, Naokhamba (411-428) who was succeeded in turn, by his son, Naophamba (428-508).12

Sameirang, the eldest son of Naophamba by the first queen had succeeded his father in 508 A.D. The custom of entertaining the warriors in a public feast on the eve of the battle and in commemoration of victory was introduced in his time.13 Urakonthoubba succeeded him in 568 A.D. He initiated inter-clan marriage and gave his daughter in marriage to the prince of Moirang. His son, Yoi Khunjaoobaba married the daughter of the chief of the Angom. He killed most of the Angoms of Nommaijing except ten for a petty thing.14 Urakonthoubba died in 658 A.D.

There was an interval of five years between the death of Urakonthoubba and the accession of the Naothimkhong as the Angoms overran the territory. The Vijay Panchali tells us that during this time, Poireiton the Second made an attempt for the throne of Kamlab. He was prevented by a supernatural force from capturing the royal power. Another Poireiton who came to Manipur was a rival of Pakhambab. He played an important part in the cultural life of the people. From the puranas of Manipur we

11. R. K. Jhalajit Singh, op.cit., p.44; O. Bhogeswar Singh, op.cit., p.221. According to Meithei Puranas, Chingjang Naraal Pangsambab, the son of Khongching Nungmaibab was a contemporary of Pemsibab. He acquired Jiribab from the Mayang by his valour.
know several 'Poireitons' and 'Gurus' who came to Manipur from different parts of India for the propagation of Aryan culture in early times. Konthoubā was succeeded by Naothimkhong in 663 A.D.\(^\text{15}\)

Naotimkhong to Niinthoukhomba\(^{\text{(663-1467)}}\)

An important event during the reign of Naotimkhong was the visit of Samlung, the younger brother of Sukapha, the king of Pong. The Cheitharol Kumbābā simply records that Samlung lived at Pong Inkhol (Home-stead land of the Pongs) for ten years and went back to his country taking the course of the Iril river. B. R. Pemberton maintains that Samlong Phā visited Manipur in 777 A.D. He marched successfully against Cachar and Tripura and descended into Moirang and reached the Valley where he found the miserable life of the people. He based his statement on an unnamed Shan account. Col. McCulloch corroborated this view. Relying on the Shan Chronicles E. A. Gait holds that Samlongpha defeated Manipur and other states in 1220 A.D. Nothing can be said definitely about the time assigned to this invasion. But the cultural contact is evident from a number of Manipuri words for the fruits and vegetables.\(^{16}\)

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16. Captain B. R. Pemberton, op.cit., pp.114-115; Gr. W. Yumjao Singh, An Early History of Manipur, pp.149-152; R. K. Jhalajit Singh, op.cit., pp.48-49. According to a Manipuri book called Thanglon Thāngcat, Pakhamā sent one of his sons to rule the kingdom of Pong as his deputy. Some people suggest that he was the ancestor of the princes of Pong. The term, Khool liee (the first king of Pong) was found among the Meitheis. There was no arrangement for fighting between Samlung and Naotimkhong. The king of Manipur cultivated cordial (Cont'd)
The Manipuri sources tell us that he conquered voicing and collected immense spoils including a musical instrument called Tharaoci. He married a Mayang Leima (western princess) called Cingurembi and her retinues had settled down in Manipur. Khomtekcā became the king in 763 in whose reign the Moirangs invaded the principality of the Nimthoujā. He defeated them. He set out with 64 nobles for hunting. All except one lost their lives in drowning. Between Khomtekcā’s death and Loiyāmbā’s reign we have to place Kāirencā (784-799), Yārabā (799-821), Ayambā (821-910), Ceulei Ipān Lānthābā (949-959), Keipābā (959-984) and Irembā (984-1074). During these reigns there were several conflicts between the Nimthoujā and other clans. The kings of the Nimthoujā subdued all of them. Loiyāmbā became the ruler of Manipur in 1074. He proved himself to be an able king in many ways. He attacked the Angoms and leading hill villages of Manipur and extended the bounds of Manipur by occupying them. The Hill villages were forced to pay tribute to him. Under him the unification of hills and plain was in full swing. He introduced the method of division of labour among the people. A particular family was to perform its own respective function. Even a person who was devoid of one eye and leg was to do his or her duty according to his or her capacity. Details of his code relation with him by which he allowed him to settle in Manipur. As regards the cultural contact Pong-hawai (bean), Pungdog (guava) were introduced from the Pong country.


18. CK, pp.4-5; Religious and Cultural Integration of India, pp.48-49 by Dr S. K. Chatterji; R. K. Jhalajit Singh, op.cit., pp.57-60. The well known story of Khamba and Thoibi is supposed to take place during the reign of Loiyāmbā. N. Khelchandra Singh holds that the episode took place during the reign of Thāngbi Lānthābā (1302-1324).
of conduct are found in a book called Lolvumba Silek. Everyone was bound to conform to it. He who transgresses the law had to pay a fine equivalent to the price of a slave.\(^{19}\)

Loiyāmbā laid great stress on the rule of law. The relation subsisting between him and his subjects was very cordial. He divided the country into four pānnās or circles for administrative purposes. Each pānnā was required to send to the king a team of workers who were to work for the state. Each team called Lāllup. The Lāllup system was compulsory for every male. Persons in the Lāllup were given nothing. It is a form of tax paid to the king in the form of labour. Payment of tax in labour was a peculiar feature of Manipuri society.\(^{20}\) The singing of a peculiar charm called Ouṃri became current in his time.\(^{21}\) Loiyāmbā ushered a new era in the history of Manipur. He was succeeded by Loitombā in 1122 A.D. He introduced the indoor game of Kāng.\(^{22}\) He was succeeded by Atom Yoirenba in 1150 A.D. He was the first king in whose reign his own younger brother Iwān-Thābā rose in rebellion and drove him out. He fled to Khuman principality for protection and never regained his kingdom.\(^{23}\) Iwān Thābā became king in 1163. He invaded the Khuman principality twice and overran it. His son and successor Thawānthābā

\(^{19}\) Supra, Ch.I, Section 1 (Literature).
\(^{22}\) See fn. 20; CK, p.5.
\(^{23}\) See fns. 20 & 21.
became king in 1195. He and the Khumans made a joint attack on Heirem Khunja and conquered it. Seeing the evil design of the Khuman king on this occasion, he fought them and killed him, in a naval encounter. The jewels and riches of the Khumans fell into his hand. He conquered some hill villages.  

After Thawān-Thābā, Cimthāng Lānthābā (1231-1243), Thimbāl Selhombā (1242-1247) and Purānthābā (1247-1263) became the kings one after another in succession. According to James Johnstone, a Chinese force invaded Manipur in 1250. The king reigning in Manipur at this time was Purānthābā. There is no mention of Chinese invasion in 1250 in the Cheithārol Kumbābā and other chronicles of Manipur. On the fact of invasion, the defeat of the invaders and their settlement in Manipur there is no controversy. Regarding the time, accounts differ. The question will be discussed later.

Khumombā became king in 1263. For the first time the Kabaws (a branch of Shan people inhabiting the Valley between the present Indo-Burma border) invaded the principality of the Khumans. King Khumombā helped the Khumans against the invaders. He drove the Kabaws and captured some of them as prisoners.

Moiramba succeeded him in 1278. He conquered a Naga village called Maki (near modern Karong in the Imphal-Dimapur road).

25. CK, pp.6-7; Thawānthābā MS; James Johnstone, My Experience in Manipur and Naga Hills, pp.80-81; Nandalal Sarma, Meitrābak, pp.LIX-IX.
defeated the Khumans and the Moirangs. After him Thambi Lanthava became king in 1302 who was followed by Komyamba in 1324. The Cheitharel Kumbaba tells us that the first Mayangs (the people from Cachar or Tripura) invasion took place in his time. He repulsed them and captured five persons. Minor kings like Telheiva, Tonavā, Tavumvā and Punsivā ruled Manipur from 1335 to 1432.

Nimthoukhomvā became the king in 1432. He raided Aklā, a hill village in 1443. During his absence, the Tangkhuls of the North-Eastern Hills led by their chief attacked the capital. His queen, Linthoingamvi prepared to defend the capital by a strategy. The Tangkhuls had to return only after making a treaty with the queen. Details of the stratagem are found in Nimthourol Lambuba.

Kyamba to Mumyambā (1467-1597)

In 1467 Thamwai Nimthoubā became the king of Manipur. He assumed the title of Kyamba, the Conqueror of Kyāng. The most important event of his reign was the annexation of Kyāng, a Shan kingdom in the Kabaw Valley. In about 1470, he and his ally, Choupaha Khek Khomba the king of Pong made a joint attack on Kyāng and conquered it. Their victory was performed with great pomp.

27. CK, pp.7-9.
Gifts were exchanged between the two kings. They also fixed the boundary line of Manipur and the Shan kingdom. By it, Shamjok (the Shan state of Thaungdoot) was equally divided between them. Manipur extended up to the Loijiri Hills in the east. According to B. C. Allen, in his *Assam District Gazetteers*, Vol. IX, the king of Manipur gave his daughter in marriage to the king of Pong. On her way to Pong she was carried off by the Rājā of Khampat. But the combined forces of Pong and Manipur conquered and expelled the Rājā of Khampāt from his territory. The king of Pong visited Manipur Valley and introduced a long lined house (instead of old Naga house). He also presented the Rājā with a golden pandhan, a silver mounted dao, and a litter, which with a sacred spear were for many years the insignia of royalty. The golden pandhan disappeared in 1850 when it was carried off by Rājā Debendra Singh. No mention of this fact is made in the Manipuri chronicle.

The Nāvangs invaded Manipur in 1504. A large force under the command of Angom king Loijangamba and prince Nimthoubā routed the invaders. It is likely that the invaders were not the Cacharese. They may be the Koches under their General Narānāyān. E. A. Gait following the Koch Chronicles, writes, "Messengers were sent to the Raja of Manipur calling on him to submit and pay tribute, and the Raja feeling himself too weak to oppose so powerful a prince, at once complied with the requisition. His tribute was fixed at twenty thousand rupees, three

30. CK, pp.10-11.
hundred gold mohars and ten elephants." The Manipuri version is different from it. The two contradictory accounts when properly scrutinised suggest that both sides claimed victory over each other.32

Kyāmbā's successors - Koirembā (1508-1512), Lamkyāmbā (1512-1523), Nomínphābā (1523), Kabombā (1523-1542), Tamjāmbā (1542-1545), Chalāmbā (1545-1562) and Mumyāmbā (1562-1597) ruled the country. The Angoms under their king Loija ngambā (1504-1544) became a great power in Manipur. The power of the Nimthoujā decayed. The Angoms did not abolish the kingdom of the Nimthoujā.33 But it was during this time of trouble that the friendly relation between the king of Manipur and the Ahom king of Assam was established. The route to Assam was opened in 1536-37 for the first time. The marriage of a Manipuri girl with the king of Assam is recorded in the Cheithārol Kumbābā. She went to Assam in 1536-1537 by this new route. A kind of fish trap made of bamboo was first used by the Manipuris in this year. The name Tekhāo-ru or Assamese fishing trap suggests that it came from Assam. Aniseed was introduced in Manipur in the same year. The elephant from Assam called Tekhāo Ngamba or the conqueror of Assam was brought from Assam. The elephant was so named on account of the enthusiasm of the Manipuris arising from the contact with Assam. According to


the chronicle of the Ahoms, i.e., Ahom Buranjī, the Ahom king Chaopha-Shuhung-mung (Dihingia Rājā) gave a girl of the Lan-makhru family, named Khukdang to Chaomen, the ruler of Manipur. Chaomen also exchanged a princess and presents with Dihingia Rājā. According to E. A. Gait, in 537 the Ahom king sent envoys to the king of Manipur and presents were exchanged. This is to be historically correct, despite the fact, that there is a difference of one year between the Manipuri chronicle and Assamese chronicle.

Mumyāmbā was an illustrious ruler in whose reign Manipur gained a great political power. He attacked Mumyang (a principality near the Kabaw Valley), Samjok (a principality in the Kabaw Valley), and defeated the Moyons and the Kabaws. He collected immense booty. Some Shans, and the people from the rest of India were assimilated into the Meithei society. According to the chronicle, the Manipuris defeated the Burmese in 1563 and captured five persons with some muskets as war trophies. W. S. Desai writes that Bayi-naissance of Manipur.

The British historian, G. E. Harvey shows that Bayi-naissance annexed the whole of Upper Burma, the present Shan states, Manipur, Chiengmai and Viengchang (Lenzin). The Manipuris had sent tribute to him. He also shows Manipur as a part of Burmese

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territory in a map of Burma under the Toungoo dynasty. The statement cannot stand on examination because we have no evidence of the Burmese suzerainty in the chronicle. There is no trace of a new city or pa-goda built by him in support of his conquest. If Mumyamba is a tributary king of Burma, his name must be absent in the lists of Manipuri kings in consonance with the tradition of Manipur. Manipur under a king of the calibre of Mumyāmbā cannot acknowledge Bayi-nnaung's supremacy without a contest. To them death would be more glorious than submission.36

Khāgemba ruled Manipur from 1597 to 1652 A.D. A trouble arose between him and his step-brother, Sanombā on the question of boat. In 1606, Sanombā invaded Manipur from Cachar with a force which included a large number of Muslim soldiers, singers, artisans, etc. The king defeated the invaders and captured a large number of Mayāṅgs, Muslims, 30 elephants and a large number of muskets. All the captured persons including the Muslims were allowed to settle in Manipur.37 By this time, the Mughal empire reached its zenith of glory, the rule of Akbar the great, has just ended and the rule of Zahanghir is soon to open. Manipur was in danger of being attacked by the Muslims. But the difficulty was done away by Khāgemba and Manipur remained free from the Muslim attack.

He is said in the Manipuri chronicles to defeat the Chinese invaders in 1630. There are different views regarding this invasion. James Johnstone refers to an invasion of Manipur by the Chinese in 1250. Yet T. C. Hodson shows the Chinese invading Manipur during the time of Khāgembā in 1630. Viśāva Paṇḍālī puts the invasion in 1588 during the time of Mumyāmbā, making due allowance for the slight discrepancy. There is also found a story among the people about the arrival of some Chinese cannibals in Manipur during the reign of Mumyāmbā. They narrate that the king killed them. From Nārthourol Lamāuba it is clear that Khāgembā defeated the Chinese invaders and assumed the title of "the Divine king" who defeated the Chinese.

He captured many invaders from Tripura after a hard fighting in 1603 and 1634. He successfully overran Samjok, Kyāng in the beginning of the seventeenth century and carried many captives, one girl of Kyāng, numerous buffaloes and elephants. The chronicles describe these events.38 The fight between Khāgembā and the Avas (Burmese) is known from the Cheithārōl Kumbābā. The king defeated them and captured two Burmese fleets and some Burmese invaders. The captives settled at Kabaw-Leikāl. The Burmans were known as Avas, a corruptive word of Ava. The Burmese were called as Ava by the Chinese as well as by the English. At this time Burma was ruled by Mahadammayuza-Dipātī.39

King Khāgembā took much interest in the construction of the country during his reign. He founded ten bazars, introduced the using of turbans, palanquins, silver caps and smoking of tobacco (1610). He reformed the scale of measurement in matters relating to land and paddy. They still persisted in Manipur. The country's economics was started in right earnest, golds were collected from river beds in 1623. He constructed many forts and dug many rivers. He built temples in 1617 and 1632. The salt mines were improved by him. He introduced the method of transplanting paddy. A kind of coarse rice (Tāothrabi) was introduced for utilising swampy land. He improved the games of polo, boat race (Hiyah). According to Cheithārol Kumbāba, the act of writing the Meithei script was attributed to him. He improved the manner of keeping Cheithārol Kumbāba by inserting the names of the months in which the events took place. From the chronicle it is clear that he maintained friendly intercourse with the king of China and sent his brother, Khwairākpā to the court of China in 1631. Nothing definite is mentioned of his arrival in China and he might visit a fringe of China.40 By the persecution of the Muslims many Brāhmans and Yogis migrated from the rest of India to Manipur where they settled permanently. He addressed himself to the task of improving the judiciary system of the country. Forty miles from Imphal to the south is situated Sugnu where King Khāgembā established courts for trying criminal cases. Judiciary was considered to be the handmaid of

40. CK, pp.24-29; M. Jhulon Singh, Vijaya Panchali, p.72.
religion. The convicted persons were killed at Seroupung (a mound) near Sugnu. At this place there are ruins of his buildings which indicate that he took keen interest in ensuring justice to the people of distant areas. Various types of divine instruments such as scissor and stones were in use for inflicting penalty on the accused persons. He also opened a new office for the Muslims according to Muhammadan customary law.41

Khāgembā was succeeded by Khunjābā in 1652. The very title suggests that he was a lover of peace. Two bunds were constructed, and a moat was dug before the brick wall in front of the palace. He dredged the Nambul river in 1664 and improved the site of Khwāiramband Bāzār now known as the greatest Bāzār in Manipur. He also pushed his eastern conquest as far as Samjock and Kabaw Valley. He collected immense booty consisting of cows, buffaloes and elephants. He overran Mansātābā, a tiny principality in the Kabaw Valley in 1657.42 Some hill villages rose in revolt in his reign but they proved unsuccessful by his wise handling. He maintained friendly relations with the king of Assam. Some travellers who had gone to Assam were reported to come back to Manipur in 1664.43

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42. L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, op.cit., pp.32-34.
43. ČK, p.33.
At this time the struggle for the throne of Delhi was carrying on among the sons of Shahajahan. Some Mughals came to Manipur in pursuit of Shuja, the second son of Shahajahan. Mirjumla while chasing Shuja invaded Assam in 1662. The hardships of campaigns in an unhealthy climate struck him and he could not reach Manipur. Khunjaobā died childless in 1666.44

Pālkhombā, the son of the younger brother of Khunjaobā came to the throne in 1666. In his time, the reclamation of jungles was in full swing. Forests covered most of the places of Imphal Valley. The population was increasing at an alarming rate. In order to provide habitation, the forests were cleared and tigers and wild animals were killed by a select party of armed men. The number of tigers killed by the king was computed to be thirty-nine.45 Wild animals were hunted down and either tamed or killed. The year 1673 was spent for the sole purpose of domesticating the elephants. The deforestation scheme and the fight with the wild animals were a difficult job by that time. The chronicle records a fight between a tiger and an elephant in the market. The tiger was weakened by breaking the forelegs. The result is not mentioned. In December 1687, there was a kind of amusement where armed men fought with the tigers in the open market. The king, queen and the commoners witnessed it. Of the eight tigers caught in that year from the Lāngol hill (a hill near Imphal) three were selected for the amusement. They were speared to death.46

44. Dr Wad quoted by R. K. Sanahal Singh, Manipur Itihaś, p.46
46. Loc. cit.
The king constructed many roads, built many dams, and improved the irrigation system of the country. He engaged five hundred and four men for the construction of bricks for three months in 1687. During the drought in the latter part of his reign, he made efforts to relieve the population by the free distribution of grains.

Manipur under Pālkhombā had commercial and political intercourses with Burma. Horses and elephants from the Kabaw Valley were prized in Manipur. He had many military achievements. He turned over Samjok twice, one in 1692 and another in 1693. He collected cows, buffaloes, elephants, weapons etc. He invaded the Kabaw Valley and defeated the Shan chief of Pālkhu. On account of this, he came to be known as Pālkhombā, the conqueror. (His original name was Khun Khombā). It is recorded in the chronicle that the Tripuris invaded Manipur in 1696. The attack was repulsed and sixteen persons were captured as hostages in all. In February, 1693, the news reached that the Burmese were contemplating to invade Manipur. To counteract the plan, the king invaded Burma and defeated the Burmese. It is also said that he came to terms with the king of Burma. A treaty

47. L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, CK, p.42.
50. Ibid., p.49; R. K. Jhalajit Singh, A Short History of Manipur, pp.112-114.
was cemented by a matrimonial alliance between them. He gave
his daughter in marriage to the king of Burma. 51

IV. Religious History till the end of the
Seventeenth century

It is proposed to draw attention to the religious ideas of the people of Manipur from the first century to the seventeenth century. We have no definite information about the details of religious belief before the first century A.D. The Manipuri word for god is 'lāi' which is shown to be a derivative of the Dravidian or Kol term 'Linga'. Everything pertaining to the religious realm is customarily preceded by the word 'lāi', for example, lāisang (temple of god), lāipham (place of god), lāining lambi (way of devotion), lāipão (message of god), etc. 1 The number of deities worshipped by the Meitheis is computed to be three-hundred and sixty-four in addition to the three members of the Trinity, i.e., Atiyā Guru Śīramā (Sky-god), Sanāmah (Sun-god) and Pákhambā (Moon-god). For purposes of worship the deities can be divided into three groups, viz., lāi, god of the countryside or forest, presiding over the diverse aspects of nature; the primal necessity of an agricultural community like Sorāren, Imumlāi- the tutelary deity of each house like Fire or Sanamahi and ancestor of

51. See fn. 50; R. K. Sanaḥal Singh, Manipur Itihās, p.47.

each clan like Pureiromba. In some cases all the three may be
resolved into one by concidance. These deities can be grouped
into the three categories according to another principle: Vedic
gods; Puranic Hindu gods and Evil spirits. It is meet and
proper that we should discuss here briefly some of the important
deities.

The Sky is called Ātiyā which means the impersonal
absolute. Later on, the Sky was personified and called Ātiyā
Guru Sidābā which means the immortal Guru or the sole breeder
of all that is bred. W. Yumjao Singh and R. K. Jhalajit Singh
have tried to trace the origin of the Manipuri word 'Ātiyā'
from Sanskrit dyauś or a confused form of the word Aditi or
Ādityā in the meaning of Aditi. In the mythology of Manipur
He is described as the husband of Leimarel Sidābi, the goddess
of earth. Ātiyā or Heaven is described as the forefather of all
gods, men, animals and plants. He is symbolised with a mystic
symbol locally known as "Anji" having the figure seven for its
main body and sometime with the numerous dots round the figure
beet never above the nadbindu.


3. This classification is more fully brought in the follow­
ing paragraphs of this section. Also see M. Kirti Singh's
article on the "Religious History of Manipur" included in
pp.95-105.

4. See B. C. Sinha's "Manipur State Flag", in BhasaAsiflg
Khomijinbā (published by MSP), Imphal, 1954, p.15.

5. W. Yumjao Singh, An Early History of Manipur, pp.88-92;
The ancient Meitheis worshipped the Sun as a prominent male deity. We find two legends about Sun-worship in the folk-tales of Manipur. There were two Sun-gods born of the mother of gods in the beginning of creation and the elder one who is mentioned in the folk-tale of "Numitkāppā" was shot by Khvil Nomjengbā Pibā with his arrow. The second Sun called Nomjengbā is the visible luminary in the sky. According to another lore the Sun-god came down from the sky and married Sanā Khomnāng Leima. But this does not concern us at the present. The Sun-god was represented as travelling on horseback. The conception of the Sun as the eye of other personal gods such as Vaṣuna, Agni, and of human beings had its parallel in the belief of the Meitheis for the reason that the word "Numit" (meaning the Sun), literally means the eye of human beings, (mu = human beings and mit = the eye).

The Meitheis worshipped the Sun under the name of Sanāmahi the creator of the universe. Yet Sanāmahi as a god of the trinity had a more independent and dramatic character. The hagiology of the Meitheis connects the cult of three mortal gurus. The daily movement of the Sun across the vault of the sky was worshipped under the names of Mangāng guru in the morning, Luwāng guru in the moon and Khuman guru in the evening.

6. T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, pp.120-154, Section on Folk tales of Manipur, "Numit Kāppā" also supra, Ch.I, Section II.
The heliolatry is very prominent in the religious belief of Manipur. The cults of Sanamahi and the gurus are drawn from the Sun.

The Moon is called 'Thā' (spelt as Toha by Dr S. K. Chatterji). It is a male deity. In a book called Leithak Leikhāron it is related that Guru Sidaba created the Sun and the Moon in the form of men under the name of "Konjengtuthokpā" and "Asibā". Another name for the Moon is Loidam Thāja Pakhamba in the Meithei story. Pakhamba, the divine ancestor of the Nimthoujā clan is treated as an incarnation of the Sun. This cult was very popular in Manipur and is still a living faith among the Andro Lois. The Moon is worshipped by them on an auspicious day of the last quarter of every month.9

The cult of planets and stars was very popular in Manipur and the Purānic stories testify to this. It is said that the seven gods who came with Guru Sidabā (Almighty) in human form were identified with seven planets. They are Nominaling (Sun), Nimthoukāba (the Moon), Leipākpokpā (Mars), Yumsakeisa (Mercury), Sagolsen (Jupiter), Irai (Venus) and Thāma (Saturn). These planetary deities were represented as animal-headed. Mars had the head of a buffalo, Mercury that of an elephant, Jupiter of a stag and Venus of a tiger. Seven goddesses who were married to the seven gods gave birth to seven sons. These seven sons were the progenitors of the seven clans of Manipur according to an account.10

W. Yumjao Singh identifies Guru Sidabā with the pole star and three stars in the middle of which He seems to appear constituting the three pods of His seat. The ancient Luwāng clan regarded the six pleids (Krittikas) as Khomjomnubi (women roaming in the sky) and Ōrion as their lovers (Naga boys) pursuing them. They regarded the pleids as girls of their family. The popularity of the cult of stars is evident from the notice of twenty seven stars with archaic Manipuri names. The cult was now reinforced by the influence of astrology which gave a new impetus to the study of stars. In some works on medicine we find references in which the planets and the stars are worshipped by the māiba for recovery from disease and for the prosperity of the whole population.

The people of Manipur during this period used to worship the god of rain and thunder under the name of Sorāren which means the chief of gods (Sora God and ren the chief or the highest). In the opinion of some Manipuri scholars Sorāren is a corrupted word of Surendra. In some accounts, he is identified with Ativa, the highest god of the Meithei Trinity. An interesting feature of this cult is that Sorāren is Vedic Indra rather than the sensual Indra of the Purānas. He had one temple and a clan who worshipped him annually. The temple which

13. Ibid., pp.84-87; S. K. Chatterji, Religious and Cultural Integration of India; Atombapur Memorial Lecture, p.42.
is exclusively dedicated to him is at Thoubal Haoba (thirteen miles to the south of Imphal). According to the mythology of Manipur he killed the evil spirits with the help of his thunder-bolt. A particular Manipuri family called Soirensangbam manufactures and offers a thunder-bolt made of iron to the deity annually.14

Wambaren was a river deity and remained the guardian of the southern part of Manipur. He is terror-personified in the Meithei pantheon and the anthropomorphism is developed on his terror aspect. He is shown as a deity with black complexion, black garment and a black tiger is shown as being engaged in the task of carrying him. People who died of drowning were said to be killed by Wambaren who was displeased very easily. Flood is supposed to be caused by his anger and the people have to keep the deity in good honour by following the decorums and formalities of his cult. Agreeable to this notion, gold necklaces, tall bedstead, and any show of attachment to a person of opposite sex were condemned at the time of his worship.15 His main temple was at Sugnu on the bank of the Imphal river (forty miles to the south of Imphal). Atombapu Sarma was greatly impressed by the similarity between Wambaren and Vedic god Indra. According to another interpretation, he is identified with Yama.16

15. Atombapu Sarma, Manipur Itihās, pp.130-136; L. Ibungohal Singh, Introduction to Manipur, p.26. According to tradition, Wambaren fell in love with a princess of Anal Nanphou (hill tribe) and married her. It was a matter of relation between the hill people and the people of Manipur.
16. For a discussion on this identification, see S. K. Chatterji, Religious and Cultural Integration of India, p.43.
The fire was worshipped in every dwelling house. The ancient Meitheis had a belief to the effect that a place must be set apart at the centre of every house for preserving fire. An iron tripod called votsabi is placed on the hearth (phuṅgā). Fire is to be kept burning day and night with husk, fuels and other materials round the fire. Orthodox-minded people used to offer to fire whatever they have to eat before they eat. According to the belief current in these times the person who had the habit of performing this sacrifice must not lag behind in food, clothing, etc. Fire is to be kept in a house at least for five days at the time of a formal entry of a new house. This belief had some points in common with the Vedic conception of fire as the guardian deity of a dwelling house and the Vedic attribute of fire as the giver of wealth.

In a Manipur book called Poireiton Khunthokpā, it is mentioned that a band of colonisers under the leadership of Poireiton introduced the art of using fire in about 33'A.D. But the use of fire in such a latter period is highly improbable. Before Poireiton, the people of Manipur used fire for making pottery and for some rites. On the testimony of some books we know that some of the Meitheis practised cremation. It is supposed that the new comers lived the same way of life and opened a vaiṅa of fire at the foothill of Nommāicing hill.


The fire is still there by establishing a doi village in this area. The name of the village is called Andro whose primary duty is to add fuel to the fire by a customary law of the country. 19

Fire is a deity whose worship is conducted by the individual members and not by the māibās and māibis. It is not an Umendlāi (sylvan deity of the Meitheis).

The deity of Kaubru is worshipped among the Meitheis. He occupies the position Kubera does in the Hindu pantheon. He is considered to be the regent of the north. His abode is Mount Kaubru (9000 feet above sea level) named after him. 20 According to scholars in this field, Kaubru is the celestial abode where the spirits used to meet annually. In one phase of religious thought he was considered to be the greatest divinity who received a good deal of hymns. The verse "awāng Kaubru ॐsuppā, loināi khunda āhānbā" meaning Kaubru, the supreme dictator of the north and god affording ground for the first human habitation, 21 is addressed to him.

This deity is worshipped annually by the kings with the sacrifice of goats, sheep, etc., in order to avoid famine, 21

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19. Poireiton Khunthokpā MS; R. K. Jhalajit Singh, A Short History of Manipur, pp.20-21. M. Chandra Singh wrote an article in the Khonthāng magazine, December 1969, where he quotes many lines from the original Poireiton Khunthokpā in order to prove that Poireiton did not introduce fire in Manipur.


21. The verse is addressed to Siva. M. Jhulon Singh considers Kaubru to be a form of Siva. Vide Vi.1ava Pancśli, p.13.
pestilence, and other calamities. He was considered to be the god of the countryside as well as the god of the clans. Temples dedicated to him are to be found among the loi villages (Sekmai, and Phayeng).  

Sanamahi, the second of the Meithei Trinity finds an important place in the religion of Manipur. The Manipuri Purānas make Sanamahi a son of Guru Sidābā and Leimarel Sidabi, and elder brother of Pākhāmbā. The myth relates that he created the universe, mortal beings, frogs, animals, etc. He created man in the image of the Almighty father. The Guru infused intelligence into it in order to adore Him. Sanamahi is molten gold in complexion like the Sun-god (Hiranyapāni). Some scholars suggest that the name is derived from 'Senmhyā' of the Vedas.

Every family has a pibā (chief) whose main function is to officiate as a priest in his puja. He is propitiated on the last day of a year. The image of Sanamahi is ceremoniously washed in the morning. Rice offering or cake offering is made to him to the accompaniment of mantras. Every member of the sib or sub-sib takes part in the rite. He is worshipped together with his mother, but seldom alone. He is also worshipped in every house and identical procedure is adopted. A particular place is set apart in the south-west corner of the house. The people burn incense and wave lamp before Sanamahi and Leimarel. He is the


23. Atombapū Sarma, Manipur Itihās, pp.106, 120; Also E. Nilakanta Singh's paper read before UGC, Seminar held at Imphal, in March, 1968.
god of all those who desire life and energy. He is prayed for the removal of disease. Some of the divinations and sorcery are traced to him. Prayers are addressed to his one-hundred and sixty-eight names of which each is a contemplation of his function. The festivals like Geirāobā and Sanāmahi Chemhombā, etc., celebrate the glory of Sanāmahi. There was a belief, a century ago, that the worship of this deity by a Rājakumār, implies an attempt to usurp the throne. The worship of Sanāmahi is not confined to the Meitheis. The Lois (scheduled tribes) and the Purums (an old Kuki tribe of Manipur) absorbed this cult. The Lois of Andro, Sekmāi, Phayeng, etc., perform the sacrifice of fowls, pigs in the shrine of Sanāmahi. The worship of this deity by the Highlanders bear the influence of the Meithei Sanāmahi cult.

Pakhamba is the destroyer of Meithei Trinity whom the Meitheis worshipped on important occasions. According to scholars in this cult, Pakhamba is known by several other names, such as Thā (the Moon), Anānta (the snake-god), and Sīva. There is no need for such interpretations for right from the first century A.D. the cult of snake, Tāntricism and local aspect were merged with the cult of Pakhamba under some external influence. The meaning of Pakhamba is 'one who knows his father'. It also

26. T. C. Das, The Purums, C.U., 1945, p.195. In the C.K., it is mentioned that King Garibniwaz performed the wine offering rite of Sanāmahi in the bazar, with his wives and nobles. They put on Naga dress on this occasion, i.e. Sunday, August-Sept. 26, 1746 (p.102). Also Folk-lore, Vol.XXIV, 1913, p.413.
means 'to be youthful'. Though he is described as the destroyer of the universe (Haravā and Leithingāl in Manipuri language) in the mythology of Manipur, the Meitheis consider him to be the creator. When he was installed as the king of Yumphāl, (Kangleipung) he set himself to the construction of rivers, mountains and roads. He is said to have assumed the form of snake on different occasions for the development of Manipur and the well-being of the subjects. He rides on Tāoroināi, a deity that can transform into a serpent, a sword, and a whirlwind. He is the ancestral deity of the Nimthoujā clan. Pākhambā in the form of a snake is the soul of the ruling king. The banner of Manipur state is the snake form of Pākhambā. When Pākhambā is seen in the form of a large snake it is indicative of danger to the state, while the appearance of a small snake portends the normal standard. There are many legends and early purānic works which have dealt with the saga of Pākhambā. On the authority of them and the chronicle, it is said that an important festival commemorating his ascendency to the throne is celebrated by the kings especially on the occasion of their coronation on a large scale. He was held in high esteem in Manipur in later times.

Highly popular as the Meithei Trinity was Nompok Nimthou who is the guardian of the eastern direction of Manipur Valley. The name of Nompok Nimthou coupled with that of Nompok Pānthoibi has come down to us from the eighth century. The love

28. T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, Section on Habitat; J. Roy, History of Manipur, pp.178-179; also Ch.V of the present work.
dalliances of the divine pair, described in the well-known text, *Panthoibi Khonung* and the songs of Manipur represent a rather similar story of Kṛṣṇa and Rādā. Nompok Nimthou superseded other gods and became the central deity of *Lai-hārāoba* festival. Later, all male and female *Umaṁlāis* were either subordinated to Nompok Nimthou and Nompok Panthoibi. They were identified with Śiva and Dūrgā respectively.  

One of the most popular of the ancient deities is Thāmjing. He is the protector of the south-western direction of Manipur. The love literature, legends and stories which the people of Manipur owed much to Moirāṅg for its culture is attributed to god Thāmjing. In the later *Purānic* works he is identified with the *Asvini-Kumārs*.

He has agricultural traits as he controls the verbal rain. He takes up his abode in a hill known as Thāmjing. There is a temple dedicated to him at Moirāṅg.

Mārjing is another deity connected with cattle. He is also the guardian of north-eastern direction of Manipur. The Manipuri game of Polo and foot-hockey is traced to him. The people invoke his name and worship him with polo-stick and ball at the time of cattle epidemic in the country.

29. For this identification, see the works of Atombapu Sarma on this subject. S. K. Chatterji endorsed this point in *Atombapu Memorial Lecture, No.1*, p.65; F. Bowers, *The Dance in India*, p.113


The important goddesses worshipped by the Meitheis are Leimarel, Nompok Pāntheibi, Phaoibi, etc. The earth goddess under the name of Leimarel (the great princess) is a fascinating one. She represents the variety of names and functional differences in the religious thought of Manipur. Female deities such as Phaoibi (Meithei counterpart of Śrī, and the presiding deity of corn field) and Pāntheibi (the goddess of love and pleasure) have frequently and variously been described as the aspects of Earth-goddess. A legend has made her a house-hold deity associated with Sanāmahi. In every Manipuri house there is a special seat to the north of the hearth. In the house of a pībā there is a small platform raised above the plinth. An earthen pot containing water is placed on the platform. It is considered good to plaster her place with the water and to fill it up with new water on every Tuesday.

Many minor gods like Khoriphabā (deity of copper), Khamlāmbā (deity of iron), Nomsābā (the deity of creation of stones and rocks), Yumthāi Lāi (the establisher of houses), etc. were worshipped in these times.

33. Atombapu Sarma, Manipur Itiḥās, pp.117-118.

34. S. K. Chatterji, Religious and Cultural Integration of India, pp.46-47. According to the legend, Leimarel-Sidabā have been a patron of Pākhambā when Guru gave the Kingship of Manipur to anyone of the brothers who can make a circuit of the world and come back first. Sanāmahi in his terror-inspiring manifestation attacked Pākhambā who was made the king by Guru Sidabā. The matter was pacified by Guru and declared that Sanāmahi would get divine worship with his mother Leimarel in every house.
Ancestor worship is well-established throughout Manipur. The ancestors of the clans are called Apokpas. The people have evolved an elaborate system of rituals for this cult. The names of Apokpas are Pakhambā for the Nimthouja, Poireiton for the Luwangs, Pureirombā for the Angoms, Khamdingon for the Moirangs and Nungaoyumthaba for the Chemleis. Apart from this, we can as well point out that every sāgei (family), every sib or sub-sib had god or goddess as their ancestors. Thus a Laisram a particular Manipuri clan may have Laisram Lairembi as its family deity, Sanāmahi, its house-god and sib-god and Khuman Pokpā as its Salai-god. There are certain Lais (deities) which belong to the whole Manipur though they are the ancestors of a particular clan, i.e., Pakhambā, Soibol Lairemā, etc. The Manipuri concept of ancestor worship would, on no account, be confused with the lower forms of ancestor worship. The ceremonies and festivals performed in every deity are the same. The gods are worshipped in the sense of Almighty Father. On this account we may say that what they adore is the one God in the many gods. In the hymns addressed to the gods we have a tendency towards monotheism.

Closely connected with the cult of Apokpas, is the cult of ancestral spirits (spirits of departed ancestors) called Kasālāi. The spirits are worshipped on the occasion of Ephanthābā (the sixth day of delivery) or Chawumbā (rice giving ceremony) in the case of baby. When a particular house-holder

is disturbed with bad dreams or masturbation or mental afflictions, offerings are made to the dead ancestors one by one naming them with the implication that they should leave him in peace. 37

The worship of Ūmamālai is conducted by the priest and priestess (māibās and māibis) whom the people feared and respected. The māibās and māibis as these hierarchs are better known we afterwards abbreviated as māiβa and mābl respectively. They have a sound psychological knowledge. 38 The māiβas fix important dates for the deities and perform colourful ceremonies of the state. The writing of Cheithārol Kumbābā in ancient script is exclusively entrusted to them. 39 They also perform medical psycho-analytical method of treatment. The religion of Meitheis is considered to have been revealed to them. After schooling himself a māiβa is ordained to be a priest by, Loisang. A māiβa is the custodian of the music and dance of Manipur. 40

The māibis are the partners of the māiβa in spiritual works. A peculiarity of mābl is that the males also perform as māibis. A male mābl is effeminate and dresses in white in spiritual works. A woman who would be māibis had a call which is evidenced

37. For this point I am indebted to some physicians of Manipur. The term "Kasā" is found among the Hill tribes of Manipur. The practice of masturbation in dream is called Kasā chatpā.

38. Ātombapu Sarma, Manipur Itihās, pp.133-134; R. K. Jhalajit Singh, A Short History of Manipur, pp.24-25.

39. Vide a paper contributed by E. Nilakanta Singh to the U.G.C. Seminar held in March, 1968.

40. T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, Sec. on the Priest.
by incoherent language and tragic call of fate. After getting training in spiritual works under a recognised māibi she returns to her home and husband (if she ever married). The centre of her life and means of livelihood has shifted to predicting the future of the people and conducting the rituals.

Tree cult which was fairly universal in the world was current in Manipur where each village has its Umāmlāi. In the temples are planted stately trees, wild plants and flowers. There are certain reasons for which the people worshipped Umāmlāi (sylvan deity). When the population is increasing at alarming rate, people reclaimed the forest and marshy land in order to settle there and as a result the groves or shrines in which the deity is worshipped became isolated wood surrounded by the village. There is a belief under which nobody can steal the things or cut down the trees of gods. They should, under no circumstances, lop off the branches or leaves privately. The belief is so strong that no sooner do they stealthily take the gold, silver, etc., of Wāmbaren then they die suddenly or is crippled in his limbs.

The Manipuris believed in the oracles. The māibās and māibis were consulted in matters concerning material needs,

42. F. Bowers, The Dance in India, pp.112-113; N. Khelchandra Singh, Manipuri to Manipuri & English Dictionary, p.442.
44. See fn. 38.
difficulties such as cause of illness, war, famine, etc. The answers to these queries are not always definite but rather symbolised by utterances. The māibis are possessed by the sylvan deities in a phenomenon called māibi-lāi- tongbā (trance) and they possessed the message of the worshipped god by the help of a bell. It was a regular feature in all forest temples at present.

The generality of the Meitheis had great faith in divinatory process. The kings were believers in the efficacy of predictions which indicate what is hidden in the womb of the future. The important function in connection with the question of interest, i.e., war, pestilence, politics, etc., are performed by digging particular place at Kongbā Leithong on the 7th day of the bright half of the month of Sājibu/March-April. The earth of this place is supposed to be the abode of Pākhāmbā and Pureirombā. Seeing the creatures found inside the earth, something is known. Other divinatory processes are Yelhing Thābā (letting the hen fly in the air) Ngamu Usin (setting free two mud-fish in the pond). The principle behind it is that it is better for a beast or trees to punish rather than the man should die. They also take omen from Sanāmahi and Wāmbaren while problems occurred to them.

The Manipuris, it is said, have seen some peculiar phenomena or evil omens when misfortune occurs in the country.

They waited in silence for omen from Wāmbaren. These are well-illustrated in such happenings in which they attribute to disorders such as firing of guns in the enclosure of the deity before the British occupation of Manipur. In the same way firing sounds were heard before the out-break of the Second World War. There is an iron-bolt kept shut in the east, in the river of Sugūnu. It just flows just opposite the enclosure of Wāmbaren. It is said that the iron-bolt was found broken before the invasion of Manipur by the Japanese.46

Hindu Gods and Goddesses in the 8th(Eighth) century

An inscription dated 721 Sakabda (799 A.D.) is interesting from the standpoint of religious history. A manuscript of seven sheets of copper plates was discovered by the late W. Yumjao Singh from the village of Phayeng, a Loi village towards the west of Imphal. They were written in the archaic Manipuri script. W. Yumjao Singh observes "The manuscript referred to above professes to have been of the time of king Khomtekā of the 8th century A.D. but from the shape of the letters used as well as its language it cannot, in spite of the fact, that in it there is a passage to show that the book was buried under the ground by that king to be taken out by some fortunate person afterwards, positively be asserted that the plates are much

46. Sir James George Frazer, The Golden Bough, Ch.IV, Atombapu Sharma, Prachin Manipuri Panzika, pp.19-20, Imphal, 1950; Manipur Sanatana Dharma, pp.9-11; also a paper read by Kunjabsihari Singh, i.e., "Cultural Relationship between the Hill and Plain people" before the Conference on the Cultural Integration of Manipur held at Imphal in 1968.
older than a century. From a general perusal of the book it
seems that it was of a religious transition period, as it
advocates the worship of Shiva and Durga while at the same
time it exalts Hari as the supreme God. But the most stri-
king thing is its mention of 89 kings and 363 gods.\textsuperscript{47} From
the study of the text of the plates we know that the Manipuris
worshipped the Hindu gods such as Viṣṇu, Śiva, Ganesa and
Viśva-Karma and the goddess like Devī, Soha, etc. King Khom-
tekcā is described as a devotee of Śiva and he is said to have
a purāṇa (we do not know what it was) from Śiva. The inscrip-
tions begin with an adoration to Hari. There are references
to the cycle of birth and death, incarnation of gods and mate-
rials for worshiping Śiva. The mention of Hari appears to show
that Viṣṇavism was the main religion in Manipur in his time.
Śaivism and Saktism are less prominent than the worship of
Hari. The reference to 365 gods (W. Yumjao Singh holds that
the mention of this number is on account of the influence of
the Purānic Hindu mythology) is very interesting for it shows
religious syncretism of the Hindu Gods with the Umasālas of
Manipur. There was no sectarian animosity and the worship of
old gods was by no means extinct. This shows the liberality
and the spirit of tolerāṇā and the catholicity of the kings
of Manipur.\textsuperscript{48}

It is to be noted that the authenticity of this ins-
cription cannot be fully established at the present moment. It

\textsuperscript{47} W. Yumjao Singh, \textit{Report on the Archaeological Studies

\textsuperscript{48} R. K. Jhalajit Singh, \textit{A Short History of Manipur},
was felt that the wordings and the regnal year of its author, King Khomteka written therein has not been found to be correct. Further research is needed about the transliteration of the year of the inscription. The final word yet remains to be said after their decipherment by the experts in this field.

Manipur went a step further from the Paurânic Hinduism under the patronage of King Kyâmbâ. He got an image of Viṣṇu from the king of Pong at the time of concluding a friendly treaty. The Burmese king whose name has been generally known as the king of Pong might have taken it as a war trophy when he conquered Manipur. There is another story which is typical Buddhist Burmans which has that the symbol of Viṣṇu fell down like a ball of fire from the sky. The reigning king of Pong, Khikhomba used the image as an instrument for scratching itches which became ulcer. He presented the stone image to King Kyâmbâ in 1470 A.D. The story goes that the clairvoyant who was on spiritual spell before the image of Viṣṇu revealed to the king that he should worship the Lord with the offerings of cooked milk rice and tulasi leaves. King Kyâmbâ requisitioned the service of Bhanu Nârâyana who was sheltering in Manipuri houses in Lârik Yengbam Leikâi. His descendants became to be known as Phurâilâtpam meaning the worshipper of Viṣṇu in a masonry temple (made of bricks and stone). The image of Viṣṇu was installed in a masonry temple at the old Manipur

The capital of Lamangdong alias Visnupur\(^{50}\) (18 miles to the southwest of Imphal). Kyambâ's brick temple is almost in ruins. It still exists as a protected monument. The cult of Viṣṇu made a strong appeal to the kings of Manipur since the time of Kyambâ. It may be pointed out here that the image of Viṣṇu presented by the king of Pong has come down to us as a much esteemed heirloom of the kings of Manipur. The association of the kings with the image of Viṣṇu became intensified with the passage of time. The image is seen riding Garuḍa and holding a conch, cakra(disc), mace, and a lotus in four hands. The image is covered with gold except on the neck. It stood for composite representation and is now housed in the palace of the Mahārāja.\(^{51}\)

Khāgembā (1597-1652) also contributed to the progress of Vaiṣṇavism. The image of Viṣṇu became the insignia of the kings of Manipur. The king was treated as an incarnation of Viṣṇu in his time. The image is carried on the back of a white horse or an elephant when the kings go from place to place. In 1635, Khāgembā introduced a change in the annual boat race festival by keeping a boat apart for the image of Viṣṇu.\(^{52}\) At Khurāi Lāirikyenbam Leikāi a metal image of Viṣṇu has been found. From the study of literary records we come to learn that Khāgembā made a gift of an image of Viṣṇu to one of his courtiers.\(^{53}\)

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51. Loc.cit.
53. See fns. 50 & 52; M. Jhulon Singh, Viṣṇav Panchāli,p.72; R. K. Sanahal Singh, Manipur Itiḥas, p.44.
Worship of great and holy people as incarnation of gods and goddesses exerted a great influence on the mind of the people. The cults of animal sacrifice, evil spirits, human sacrifice and snake worship were widely prevalent at this period. With these detailed discussions, we are not directly concerned. It is worthy of note that King Kyāmbā performed a sacrifice of mithun at Khāri Cインkhong (near the Kabaw Valley) in 1470 A.D. In the Cheithārol Kumbābā we find two animal sacrifices performed by Khāgemba in honour of Kaubru and other deities. The purpose was to give prosperity, longevity or recovery from illness, etc., to the people. This practice lost its popularity later. It should be noted that cows, horses and elephants were worshipped in Manipur. The vaisas (chief of domestic animals) were specially divine. The people took care of them and observed the śrāddha ceremony after their death. Evil spirits connected with odd corners, difficult roads, water and rivers were not wanting. The office performed by Thongārembi, the chief consort of the god of death is important. She used to carry the soul of the dead with her rope to the abode of death. There is a temple for her at Iroisemba (one mile to the west of Imphal); and worship is offered to her. Another peculiar feature of their belief is the cult of Himcāvi (Him = alive, ca = eat, vi = woman) or vampire, a physical woman who can project her astral body into the body of the people whom she wishes to attack. She is different from the material vampire who eat

54. CK, pp. 25 & 27.
human flesh and animal. Goddess Kāli is believed to work through the vampire. She is worshipped with magur-fish, hen, and other materials. 55

Socio-Religious Rites

There are socio-religious rites by the performance of which the journey of life of a person is given spiritual significance. Important events are associated with ceremony of pre-Vaiṣṇavite nature. Khoirenva (cutting the naval cord after the birth of a child), Epānthavā (worship of the deity of the sixth day of the child’s birth), Gaomvā (feeding with rice), Yumseivā (cleansing the house), Samkokpā (hair-cutting), Luhombā (marriage) have rites until they are mixed up with Hinduism. An average house-holder used to perform daily worship of Sanāmahi, Leimarel, fire and the Sun. There are other forms which were performed on the occasion of building a house, entry into a house and inaugurating a tank. 56

We now turn to a consideration of grand festivals. Important festivals are Nong Lāovā (rain copelling), Ceiraobā,

55. T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, pp.95-119; T. C. Das, Tha-Purums, C.U., 1945, p.202; Kh. Kaomacha Singh, Manipur Itivṛttta, pp.21 and 36. The strong centre of Akoksā or Himcāvi (vampire) is Ukhumisang, some miles to the east of Imphal. King Charairongba established an institution for these people.

Lai-harāoba etc. The rainy season is of importance in their life and festivals to welcome rain are very old and common in this period. Folk-songs and poems are sung at the beginnings of rains. Many of the available texts refer to drought and rites of compelling rain. The kings worship a small stone (Lingam aspect of Siva) on the top of a lofty hill, Nōmmāicing (Nongmāiching) to the east of the Iril river. The popular imagination likens it to an umbrella. He fetches water from a spring below and sprinkles it on the stone. The chief of Angom clan is supposed to be able to make rain by digging a tank. They also think that the worship of Okmaren by the piñē (chief) of Khuman will cause rain to fall.57

Ceirāoba literally means marking the close of the year. Before 1485, the festival was celebrated on the last day of a year by the king's servants by making a public announcement. They held khok (a species of bamboo, tall but slender), with little bells and used to go about the places to announce the end of the year. Kiyāmbā put an end to this practice and in its place created an institution called Ceithāvā (Cei = stick, thāvā = giving up). According to this practice, a Ceithāvā (a post created by the king for one year) must take an oath before the king and the nobles that he would shoulder all the misfortunes of the country till he was relieved by another successor. The year is named

after him. He was free from the Lālup system. He was given a reward of some clothes and some baskets of salt.  

The chief features of this festival are holy baths, the setting free of fish in a pond, reading and reciting of (Janaka) Pañcāngas by the Kanaka Brahmins in the palace and feasts in individual houses. The presiding deity of this festival is Sanāmahi. Offerings are made to him in individual houses. Each sib or sub-sib performs Caklan Katpā (rice offering) or Tan Katpā (cack offering) on the evening of this day. It begins on the last day of a year and lasts for five or seven days. The day following Ceirāobā is called Sillenva which is a Sabbath day for the Meitheis.  

Lai-harāobā festival is the most ancient festival of Manipur. It means the rejoicing or merry-making of gods (Lai = Deity, and Harāobā = to be merry). It is dedicated to the Umaṃlāis (Primal spirits of the forest). Essentially a village dance with much of its rituals is held from February to June on days fixed by the pandits. The entire village participates and the chief place of the celebration is the open meadow in front of the Umaṃlāi. The temples have no images but on this

59. See fn. 58.
60. See fn. 58.
occasion the god is represented by the bronze masks of Lāi Nimthou (Lord Siva) and Lāiremā (goddess Pānthoibi alias Durgā). The other deities are but parts of them. It is a part of ritual and dance. It has been regarded also as a religious service and village entertainment. The technique of this worship is an art by itself and involves several phases, easy forms and happiness to subtle philosophical ideas. Every item has spiritual significance and has to be conducted by the māibās and māibis. The important features of it are the invoking of the spirits from water, jīvanyās (infusing of life), offering of fruits and flowers to the deity, dance of the creation of the world, dance of the preservation of human life, problem of housing and weaving, sports like polo, boat-race, hockey, horse-riding, sword-fighting, wrestling, tug of war, etc. The worshippers consisting of a number of married women and unmarried girls have to make gestures with hands indicating thereby the series of actions into dance. The dances are performed in the manner of teaching on the part of the māibli and response and imitation on the part of those who participate it. The object of all these is to imitate the play of gods and goddesses.

The Lāi-hārāoba is counted as the unique contribution of Manipur to the domain of world culture. Songs teaching high philosophical ideas are sung in this dance. The traditional dhol (Dholak) and the pena (a kind of stringed instrument)

Special types of costume are used in the performance. They are made in Manipur. The *maibas* and *maibis* are dressed in tight-fitting, white, nurselike uniform. The outer garment for a *maibi* is called *Sarong-phi*. This sheet of cloth with special skirt is manufactured by a family called *Laiphrākpam* and is rewarded to the *maibi* by the king for spiritual work.63

This festival draws vast conglomeration of people from far and near. Individuality is lost for a while in the dance. The *Lāi-haraoba* of Thāmjing, the deity of Moirāng is very famous. Love-making, abductions and romance takes place in the get-together. Success in sports and dance attracts the attention of village damsels. The opportunity which poor Khamba had for Thoibi, the princess of Moirāng is a case in point.64

62. H. Kulabidhu, *Manipuri Dances*, pp.42-44; Nilakanta Singh's article on "Lai Haraoba" in *The Classical and Folk Dance of India, Bombay*, 1963; also vide infra Ch.VI (section on Musical instruments).


64. Vide Ch. VI (Khamba Thoibi Dance).