Chapter III

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS PRIOR TO AND DURING THE 18TH AND THE 19TH CENTURIES

Manipuri society in course of these centuries has been subject to changes under which the people have had to adjust themselves to the new environment. The concept of society is dynamic and it is from this perspective that we can speak of social and economic conditions of Manipur. The early Manipuri society consisted of seven clans or veks (sālis) and they were merged into the Meithei community. With the coming of the people from the east and the west, we enter a new period of social history. It shows that Manipur had relations with Burma and the rest of India, so far as the immigrations are concerned. History credits King Nāophamba (425-518) A.D., with the organisation of society; the basis of clan assignments of the new comers.¹ From the fifteenth century onwards, the immigrants did not lose their identity though they became part and parcel of the Meithei society.²

Pānna (Division)

The foundations of society till the announcement of Hindu concepts during the reign of Garibniwāz was the pānna system. Pānna became the most guarded institution among the

¹. R. K. Jhalajit Singh, A Short History of Manipur, p.16.
Melitheis and even after the introduction of gotra, jati and sapinda. The Manipuri converts naturally retained it as the dominant feature of the society. Manipuri society was divided into four pānna as of equal sanctity. In addition we had a race of helots called Phuṅgānāi, Pāna Khutmei people (People belonging to Hidākphanba those who attend to the hooka and Potsangbā,Watchmen), Tengkhul, Kei and Loi. It was common to see Tengkhul serving the king as gardeners and Kei as pounders of rice to the Rāja's household. People in the pānna were stratified into different grades on account of their birth. High class clans could serve all the clans (except the Brahmanas) as cooks while some clans were not allowed to give water to others. There were some who rank high among the surnames or Sāgeis of Manipur. High Sāgeis worked in the savā of Sri Govindaji by drawing water and giving the same to the deity. The next higher clans have taken to the work of cooking in the Loisang (office of the Pandits in the palace).

The family was the unit of society. It consisted of a father, mother and unmarried children born of their union. It was patri-local in residence. The society, by and large, was a patriarchal one in which the male dominated the family.

4. cf. Captain E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, p.29. He gives 2,490 Sudra people out of total population of 28685 at Imphal. This view is hardly acceptable to us. The Sudras might come from the rest of India. Further research is needed.
5. L. Ibungohal Singh, Introduction to Manipur, p.16.
As regards inheritance and partition, we find the people following the Dayabhāṅga school of Hindu law in which the heirs or heiresses inherit as tenants-in-common. The Manipuris practised the Dattaka form of adoption.

Slavery existed among the kings and the nobles. It was closely related to the institution of Phunganāi which is an excellent account of the slaves of Manipur. This was not a stigma but a status. The word nāl means a servant kept by a king. The code of the Meithei declares that out of the sons begotten by a man three must belong to the king. The first one must join the king's troop in hunting and fighting, the second one must serve the king's lāllup (ten days' compulsory labour to the king within forty days). The third son acted as domestic servant or personal attendant of the king. They were sent to the bride-groom of the princess along with their dowry. They might be given away or mortgaged by the king to the nobles in recognition of their services. The Rājā's slaves stood at 1200 or 1500. At times a man sold himself and his family members either temporarily or permanently in times of dire necessity. The wars between Manipur and Burma or Samjok were very frequent. Generally the women captured in these wars were made maid-servants of the queen and wives of the aristocratic family. The captor

9. See fn. 8.
or the prince sometimes made them concubines. They were kindly treated and rose to the position of Rājamātā or the chief queen.\textsuperscript{11}

The slavery system was recognised in Manipur till the beginning of British paramountcy. It was stopped by the British by legislation.\textsuperscript{12} A class of slaves was formed who committed theft and incurred heavy debts. The culprits were arrested and sold or enslaved till the claim for stolen goods were made good. A debtor was enslaved till the debt was satisfied.\textsuperscript{13}

The relation between the husband and wife is spiritual and moral rather than gratification of sex impulses. Promiscuity or pre-marital sex indulgences were seldom known to them. In case of adultery the punishment imposed on the offender was a fine of Rs. 50 and some fees for the court. In religious, economic and educational functions the wife shares the burdens of her husband. The Meithei society realised the ideal of monogamous form of family. The royal family and the aristocracy, no doubt, practised polygamy. Lower orders did not indulge in polygamy. The nobles had more than one wife. The treatise on sickness and cure contains hymns embodying the incantations used by the co-wives which show a discordant home. Its disastrous effect among the people was the feuds.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{11} Vide CK, where the list of captives are given in details during the reigns of Khāgembā, Mungyāmbā, etc. There are many stories where the princes married their maid-servants in the tradition of Moirāng.

\textsuperscript{12} R. K. Sanahal Singh, Manipur Itihas, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{13} Captain E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, p. 25; T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, pp. 90-91.

\textsuperscript{14} See fn. 13; also my own

\textsuperscript{15} CK, p. 299; Rājārshi Bhāgyachandra, A Centenary publication, Imphal, 1961, p. 46; T. C. Hodson, op. cit., p. 76.
As already stated, the Manipuri society was divided into seven salais. Each salai was divided into a number of yumnaks or surnames. The terms salai and yumnaks need some explanation. Yek-salai means a clan, which in its extended implication means a tribe. It has a character of a sib. The society had a particular aspect-exogamy with definite rules which prohibit marriage between particular salais, e.g., Luwang and Khumani cannot intermarry nor Moirang and Khabang-anba, etc. The Manipuri yumnak (surnames ending with m) has been translated into 'household' but it exactly corresponds to the word 'sub-sib'.

The concept of pibä is very important in the Manipuri society. The pibä is the head of the sibs of Manipur who represents his respective sibs in socio-religious functions. Some writers say that pibäship is always connected with the clans or sibs and not with the surnames. But this concept applies both to the sib and the surnames. The word 'Pibä' signifies Nimthou or king. His important function is to worship Sanambah, the tutelary deity of the Meitheis. He must marry a girl of a higher status and not any one of the inferior status. Only the eldest son of the head of a sib or a sub-sib is allowed to be a pibä. The descendants of a pibä are exempt from many of the

16. Supra, Ch.I, Section II of the thesis; S. K. Chatterji, Religious and Cultural Integration of India, p.46.
17. T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, p.73.
tire-some codes that bind the Meitheis. The sons of the second and fourth sons of a man were employed in Leikālsangāroi as workers whose duty was to build houses and gather materials. The sons of the third son were recruited in the army. Phungānāi, Kei, Lois, etc., are ordained to dwell on the importance of menial works. The arrangement worked very well with the society and to this day the question comes in connection with strictly performed religious and social functions.

In later society there were many elements. The Brāhmans, Mayangs, the Muslims were included within the framework of the Manipuri society. Manipuri society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was distinctly divided into Kṣatriyas, Brāhmans, Ganaka, Kavāstha, etc. The Brāhmans used to perform the Hindu rites, and rituals. They were responsible for the introduction of Gotras in Manipur. The majority of the Meitheis considered themselves to be Kṣatriyas. The Lois were entitled to be considered as Kṣatriyas after undergoing some ceremonies of an initiatory nature. The Kṣatriyas consisted of the people of seven salāis, the Rājāyumārs and the Viṣṇu-Priyas. The Rājakumār or Mahārājakumārs are the descendants of the rulers of Manipur.

21. For this point, I owe largely to Thongam Madhob Singh, Pandit, an authority on this subject; T. C. Hodson, op.cit., pp.84-85.
23. For this point, I am indebted to Pandit M. Chandra Singh, an authority on the custom of Manipur; see fn. 21.
They are assigned a privileged position in the hierarchy of Manipuri society. A Rajakumar shall not marry within his class. Among the Brahmins there is a class known as the Gañakas. They were the descendants of Tapan Misra. He (Tapan Misra) incurred the anger of King Chandrakirti by refusing the king's order. The king sought an opportunity to degrade the descendants of Tapan Misra to the status of an inferior caste by a royal proclamation. The Kāyasthas of northern India, who were once considered to be the Sūdras were not absorbed into the society. They served as writers in these days. But they have no yek and salāi. Outside these were the Mehetere or Hari who were not considered good enough by the Meitheis even to serve them. They were not allowed to enter villages or towns except to do scavenging work.

Marriage and Other Related Ceremonies

The Institution of marriage was governed by certain rules of exogamy and endogamy. It was ordained that a marriage should not take place within the same vek or gotra and in that sense it is exogamous. Apart from it, there was another Sāiruk tinnabā (Sāiruk exogamy) which related to the prohibition of

26. Atombapu Sharma, Manipur Itiḥās, foot note to p.286.
marriage among persons who are of the same mother but of
different fathers. Prohibited range of marriage is contracted if the persons belong to different Hárams (descendants of persons coming from the west or the east). A Mayang Nimthoujā (people from the west and merged in Nimthoujā salāi) may marry a Meithei Nimthoujā (pure Nimthoujā). It came into vogue in later times. Inter-caste marriage was not encouraged in most cases. The kings and the pibās adhered to social rules. The endogamous attitude has somewhat relaxed and softened in later times. The marriage of a Brāhman bride-groom with a Kṣatriya, Vaisya or Sudra in Gandharba form of marriage is sanctioned by the society. Captain E. W. Dun holds that the Manipuri system of marriage is opposed to all orthodox Hinduism. But there is difficulty in accepting his view. We always differ in our impressions. Marriage between cousins and the children born of them were admitted in the society. The marriage of a widower to his sister-in-law is censured.

In short, a marriage in order to receive social sanction had to be endogamous as regards caste (fell into disuse later) and exogamous as regards the vek salāi or gotra and sapinda relations. Ostracism is a serious matter which entails the ex-communication of the society as well as of the family.

29. cf. fn. 28.
31. Captain E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, Section on Caste.
Those who married within the prohibited degrees of kindred went into exile in different Loi villages of Manipur.32

The Manipuri society recognised eight forms of marriages, namely, Brahmya, Daiva, Arśa, Prajapatya, Gandharba, Asura, Rākṣyas and Peisācā. The first mode of marriage is described as suitable in the society. In cases of elopement, the bride and bride-groom are kept separately and the moment the parties succeeded in performing the ceremony in the form of Brahmya rite, the former (Rākṣasa) marriage rises to the status of Prajapatya. If, on the other hand, they fail to observe the rite, it goes down to the level of Gandharba. A valid form of Gandharba marriage must involve some performances in which the bride has to pass through Loukhatpā (receiving into favour the woman by the guardian) and Tin Lāi Thābā (offering of articles to the deity). In the latter, special articles are brought by the party of the bride-groom to the house of the bride. The kabok (mudky) is dedicated to a family god and distributed among the people.33

There is a kind of performance of Brahmya form after taking the money from the bride-groom. According to L. Ibungohal Singh it is a mere form of Asura marriage.34 Marriage is a sacrament according to the Meitheis. The rite of marriage is complex by reason of its association with various details.

32. R. K. Sanahal Singh, Manipur Itiḥās, p.7; L. Ibungohal Singh, Introduction to Manipur, pp.81-83; The CK contains many references to such crimes in its pages. We cannot individually describe them.
34. Loc.cit.
of ceremonies. The girls have no voice in matrimony but be
guided by the wish of the guardians. There was no limit for
the age of the marriageable girls. Some of the formalities
like Pāothānabā, Wāroipot, Heijapot are considered as prelimi-
nary, while ceremonies like the performance of homa and exchange
of pāna form the central part. Ceremonies like Ciruk Numsāng
Hāngbā (to open a basket containing rice and other things), Lubāk
Cengbon Kāibā, Tin Lāi Thābā and feasting the bridegroom's party
may be described as subsequent to central rites. The order of
performance is strictly enforced. Yāthang Thābā assumes the
character of a proposal coming from the bride-groom's party. The
betrothal ceremony is called Wāroipot. A similar ceremony in a
magnificent manner is vouchsafed in Manipuri society. It is
known as Heijapot. The auspicious timing is fixed by the
astrologer. In all these ceremonies the Manipuris fostered a
custom in which the bride-groom's party goes to the bride's house
with special articles. This is called Ciruk Numsāng. On the day
of marriage a special kind of cloth is to be placed at Phunāgā-
lāiru (hearth).

The actual marriage ceremony commences with the arrival
of the bride-groom's party at the mandap where is performed the
sankirtan. The bride-groom is received by the mother of the
bride at the gate. Three torches are kindled and parched rices
are thrown over the bride-groom. Then the priest recites the

35. Cited to me by Th. Madhob Singh pandit.
mantras and the ancestry of the pairs up to the great-grand parents. Then *saptā-pradaksīna* takes place; the bride walks seven times round the groom to the sound of the *mridāṅga*. After completing each round the bride casts flowers upon the groom's head. Then they seat side by side on a bench which is placed at the centre of the marriage hall. Garlands are mutually placed by them. The chaders of the bride and the bride-groom are fastened together. Suitable songs are sung at that moment. Then the bride and groom enter the cooking room and sit on the same mat and place *kāṅsubī* (sweets prepared from black mustard) in each other's mouth. Offerings of pāna and money are made to all present. 37

With this the ceremony over, the bride with her dowry is carried in a litter at the head of the party for her new home. A *dolā̄* or wooden bed as a feature of marriage procession is obtainable in Manipur. The baskets and box containing the dowry are kept closed and the *phanek* (female's lower garment) is folded in a way. On the morning of the fifth day, a subsidiary ceremony is performed in which the bride-groom's party goes to the bride's parental house and this Chēiruk Nūmsāṅg with some prayers to the family deity. Then in the afternoon of it follows the rite of Lūbāk-Cembon-Kāiba, a ceremony in which the bride's party goes to the groom's place and opens the baskets of rice and boxes. They keep the *phanek* in the ordinary way. Seeing them something is known about the

future of the pair. A feast takes place on the sixth day in the house of the bride. The Kokthok Cāmthokpa ceremony by a mālib takes place in the seventh or eighth month of the conception of the bride.38

Among the Manipuri Lois exchange of gifts and sacrifice to the gods are very common. The exhilarating spirit 'Yu' is freely served. Divination as a part of marriage ritual is to be found even to-day in the marriage ceremonials in Manipur.39

Divorce is allowed under such conditions like prolonged desertion, ill treatment leading to pain, mutual consent of the partners and physical incapacity. But barrenness on the part of the woman is not a sufficient inducement to divorce.40 According to the conception of divorce as found in Manipuri society the husband and wife enjoy certain rights. They have definite duties towards another in religious matters. In the case of any dispute between the husband and wife over the custody of the infant after divorce the husband will get it after three years of age.41 Widow remarriage was not practised by the Meitheis. Levirate (a marriage of a man with the childless widow of his deceased brother) was not in vogue in these eras. The burning of the widows along with their dead husband has been

38. See fn. 36.
39. T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, Sec. on marriage; also see supra, Ch.I, Section IV.
40. For details see L. Ibungohal Singh, Introduction to Manipur, pp.87-89.
41. Loc.cit.
found in Manipur till it was abolished by King Garibniwâz who saw two wives mounting the funeral pyre of his son, Murâricând.  

Position of Women in Society

Society, by and large, was patriarchal in which the male dominated the family and social life. Goddess cults and myths current in Manipur are very ancient and most of them prove the position of women in the society.  

The position of a girl was not low since we do not come across any reference deprecating the birth of a daughter. We use a number of names to denote a girl in her different stages of life. Some of the names such as mupimachâ and leisâbi have survived to this day. Ningol acquires such a wide meaning as to cover the unmarried girls. The sanskrit word Kanyâ seems to have been more in use in this context. The dormitory of the girls is called Ningolphâl or Morâl. The officer of this institution is called Ningol-lâkpa which means one who controls the girls.

The chronicle speaks of women who acquired the art of administration. That the life of militarism was not barred to them is attested by the activities of women like Linthoi Ngabi and Kuranga-Nayani whose performances in the critical junctures are a by-word to us. But this tendency is arrested and the

42. L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, op.cit., pp.74-75; See Ch. IV & VII.
43. My own estimate supported by the tradition of Manipur.
44. This term is evidently the influence of Sanskrit.
main symptom of decay of our civilisation is a steady suppression of women. Most of the kings, at least, two queens. Chandra-kirti had eight queens. Garibniwaz had eighteen queens. Jayasimha had ninety-four wives including five queens. In a polygamous household of a Meitheni, women depend upon men. The custom of child marriage, Sati and the custom of taking female slaves affected their position. The growth of Vaisnava ritualism rendered the life of religion and ritual difficult for women. The opinion has been very succinctly expressed by some when they say that "Manipuri woman used to sit with a load in the bazar from morning to night." Marketing is the monopoly of women in these centuries. The role of a Manipuri woman in the society of 18th and 19th centuries is significant. Household works, soft works, spinning and weaving are entirely theirs. The women have been painted in the garb of goods and chattels. We have many accounts written by the Englishmen accusing the Manipuris of selling the woman for satisfying the debts and purchasing an office and a pony. These charges were mainly based on the Englishmen's experience of their inferior domestic servants. They did not know them well enough. The observation cannot be applicable to the generality of the Manipuri people since the society was divided into many classes. They moved freely in the society. They have been depicted in the books participating along with men in music, dance and worship. We find women transcending the restrictions and proving their merit in no

47. L. Ibungohal Singh, op. cit., pp. 76-77.
uncertain fashion. The higher classes do not observe purdah. They do not cover their face with clothes with no discredit to themselves.\(^{49}\) The stratagem of Linthoingambi to save the capital from the invaders as revealed in the Nimthourol Lambuba is worthy of Sultana Rezia. Sija Lairoibi, the daughter of King Jayasimha went to Nabadüp as a propounder of Gaudiya Vaisnavism and founded a temple of Anuprabhu in this area. Then there was Māisnam Kumudini Devi, mother of Chandrakirti who exercised influence during the minority of her son.\(^{50}\)

The māibus of Manipur were outstanding in view of their contribution to the culture of Manipur. The Manipuri women resort to satyagraha to stop any unpleasant measure. There are agitations of which history gave a record that they are a big political force in Manipur. The women objected to King Chandrakirti catching elephants in the forest during the harvest season/ October-November. They liked to postpone it till after the harvest. When the prayer was not granted they went to the king and opposed him. The male folk were preparing for a revolt desperately. At last the king reconsidered his policy in order to avoid the general upheaval.\(^{51}\) The chronicle tells us how the women of Manipur assembled at Sanākeithel to save Tikendrajit from the military cordon.\(^{52}\) It is rather hasty to generalize

---

49. Ethel St. Clair Grimwood, My Three Years in Manipur, pp.58-59.
that the lot of Manipuri women was one of slavery and gloom. If we compare their position with that of their sisters during these times, we shall not find much difference. They are, so to say, polite, courteous with a good knowledge of society and obligations. 53

The role of a woman as a mother was, by far, the most important. More respect was shown to her than to the father. They say that there may be a bad son but that we do not have a bad mother is true with regard to the Meitheis. Their sexual morality is above blame. They have given the patriots, warriors and poets and personalities of no mean stature. S. K. Bhuyan observes 'Manipuri women have been enjoying a freedom which their sisters in India have failed to attain even up to the present day. Their activities are not confined to the four walls of their domestic life, they go out freely for purposes of petty trades mainly in the sale of the products of their own hands. They weave fine and durable textiles where colours are assembled in the most attractive manner. At the same time Manipuri women have shown their gallantry and valour in desperate and critical situations.' 54

A number of Hindu samskaras of child birth, death and occasions of festivity were introduced since the beginning of the 18th century. They are given in great detail in the Chapter VII of the thesis.

53. This is my observation supported by S. K. Bhuyan and Mukundalal Choudhury who wrote accounts about Manipur.

54. S. K. Bhuyan, 'Assam and Manipur', Bhāsān Khomjīnba, 1954, p.5. This is his inaugural speech at the Session of MSP held at Imphal, 1952.
Food and Drink

The Manipuris were strict vegetarians since the adoption of Vaisnavism. They have shown a great distaste for the habit of liquor and refrained from eating meat, egg, chicken, etc. Rajakumārs and children (up to 9 years) before the sacred thread ceremony are allowed to take these foods without any loss of caste. Fish was not (as it is today) prohibited to them. A custom prevalent in these times was that of chewing the betel-leaf, areca-nut and lime. The purpose is to deodorize one's breath. Tobacco was greatly consumed as a matter of conventional necessity. Ganza (hemp) and Yu (Spirit prepared from rice by the Loi people) were controlled by the Government.

Dress

Both men and women wore many clothes. Everyday the men used washed cloth or muga at the time of taking meal. They wore dhoti, shirt, and a wrapper. During the cold season well-to-do people wore padded coat. Shoes were very rare. On official occasions the nobles wore Khamen chatpa dhoti, turban and velvets. Khamen Chatpa (printed silk dhoti) was awarded to the nobles by the king. None but them was allowed to wear it.

55. E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, Sec. on Diet; See infra.
56. T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, Sec. on 'Food and Drink'.
before the king. They also used fragrant liquid prepared from sandal wood paste. The clothes are scented with the sweet-smelling fume of incense. Various kinds of cosmetics such as agaru, kukum, were recommended to them. On the neck sacred thread and Kanthi are invariably there. The soldiers wore white uniform, or uniform of white jacket and white turban. The women wore like-wise dressed in silk, or washed cloth everyday. They wore the traditional phanek (lower garment) of various patterns, red with green stripes, green with black stripes and blue with white stripes. There were various methods of wearing it. The orthodox method of wearing phanek for an old woman is to cover herself from the calf to the top of the breast. The two ends of the phanek are folded round the body under the armpits and over the breast. It is hitched up about way to the knee. Over it a white sheet called inaphi which is folded in the usual native fashion is worn. In the cold season they wore jackets with long sleeves and shirts of black-blue or green velvets. Young girls under the age of puberty wore the phanek round the loin, the upper part of the body being kept bare. Unlike the elderly folk they leave the head bare in the presence of the king or elderly people. In matter of gold

62. See fn. 61.
ornaments and jewellery, we have a variety used by the women—ear-ring, necklaces, bracelets, ankle ornaments, rings in the toes, and nose ornaments. Ear-ring made of gold can be used without any restriction. They have gold rings for earlobes. Some of them are used by both sexes. Most of the ornaments are manufactured by the local goldsmiths. Gold ornaments are used by the approval of the king. Ornaments other than metal can be freely used. 63 Majority of the people set the fashion in removing the ear-ring after the initiation ceremony. 64 The ornaments used in dance as well as in marriage will be taken up on the chapter concerning the dance of Manipur.

The people kept long hair as a matter of religious compulsion. Shaving was also practised in connection with the ceremonies, i.e., sacred thread, śrāddha, etc. 65 Moustaches were rarely seen but some of them kept thick and straight moustaches. Unmarried girls wore their hair long behind. When a girl is betrothed, the fringe of the hair which reaches almost to the eyebrows cannot be cut without the consent of the future husband. They cut their hair in front in a straight fringe all round their foreheads. The back part hangs loose. Women who are married put back their fringe. 66

63. T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, pp.18-19; E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, Sec. on 'Ornaments'.
64. This is typical of the custom of the male section of the people. The females have the custom of wearing the ear-ring.
66. See fn. 65. This practice is still observed by women of Manipur.
Games and Sports

The Manipuris lived a spartan life and sports and games were popular among them as in the west. Small children play games which formed a part of Lai-haraoba ritual. Elderly people play out-door games of which Khong Kangjei (Hockey), Sagol-Kangjei (Polo), Lamchell (race), Hiyang (Boat race) and wrestling are very important. The indoor games are Kang Sanaba, Thabal Chongba, etc. Another indoor game for the higher class is chess (Chattrang) which was a special feature of their social life.  

The Manipuri word for polo is Sagol Kangjei, i.e., hockey on horse-back which was connected with the mythology of creation. It originated and developed in Manipur and travelled beyond Manipur into the different parts to be honoured as its game. According to one account, God Marjing invented it. Another account traces its origin to Pakhambā. Great personalities of Manipur in historical times, such as Luwāng Gurū Punsībā, King Khāgemba and King Garibniwāz are said to improve this game from time to time. A white ball made of the root of the bamboo called Kangdrum and a stick which is prepared from well-seasoned cane or a long shaft of bamboo are used in

67. The playing of chess by Pakasana, son of King Chandra-kirti was the beginning of the quarrel among the sons of his. Ultimately it led to the war between Manipur and the British Government in 1891.

this game. The head of the stick is placed at an obtuse angle to the shaft. The number of players on both parties was generally fixed at seven. It is played even by ordinary villagers.\textsuperscript{69}

The costume consists of a scanty dhoti, well-tucked up so that thighs are almost bare, a pair of thick woollen goiters reaching from the ankle to the knees and a whip in the left-hand. The pony's bridle is adorned with big pompous colour cotton. On either side of the saddle there are curved shields of leather.\textsuperscript{70} Polo is a remarkable contribution made by Manipur. Good remarks have been given on the dexterity of the ponies and enthusiasm of the players by British officers in their accounts.

Little boys and grown up people play Kangjei (Foot Hockey) on village wasteland. There are nine players with slightly curved bamboo sticks. A peculiarity of this game is that a player never leaves his opponent. A player may pick up the ball and run with it some way towards the goal. There is no limit as to crossing and hitting of hooking sticks. The ends of the ground are of considerable length. The game allows hitting the Kangdrum with hockey high in the air. A wounded player may be replaced by another at any time.\textsuperscript{71}

Lamchell (foot race) was a much-loved game of the people. It was usually held in July. It was conducted on the


\textsuperscript{70} See fn. 69.

\textsuperscript{71} E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, pp.24-25.
basis of pānnā. At first there was a race from each pānnā at a time. The winners are selected for the final trial. The distance to be run by them is half a mile. The winner was free from the lālūp system for the rest of life according to the ancient code. The king and the stately dignitaries attend it and distribute the prizes to the winners at the first trial and the final competition.72

The Manipuris have a peculiar system of wrestling called Muknā Sāñabā in which the balance of a man is broken by means of legs on the legs. It is practised by raising the opponent some three feet high and fell down opponent by means of the right thigh or left thigh which he raises. This game along with Lāmchell constitutes an important part of the Lāi-haraobā festival. It is the fond hope of every Manipuri youth to become the Yātrā or the best wrestler of a particular village.73

Boat race (Hiyāng) is held with eclat on the ditch which surrounds the Rājā's palace. It is held during the month of September. Different pānnās often compete with one another. A manuscript called Hijan Hirāo (a treatise on the origin and evolution of boat race) declares that a boat was first prepared by Luwāṅ Guru Punsibā on seeing a mouse cutting and letting float the dried stem of a particular grass in the Luwāṅli river.74 He prescribes the emblem of the sangāi (a king of deer found in Manipur with two horns) in one end of the boat. Later

in the 16th century, King Thawan Thābā decorated the front part with the head of Khuman Kwākpā (a king of Khuman clan) in memory of his victory over the latter. So the two ends of the boat (king's boat) carry the symbols of carved deer's head (horn's gilt) at the prow and the head of a giant in the rear.75 Generally there are two royal boats which are richly decorated and painted with red and yellow colours derived from the orpiments. They are of equal size. Competitors from two ṃañās used these boats.76 During the reign of Khāgemba in the 17th century the king and image of Viṣṇu also participate in boat race in order to amuse the people with the game. So there are four persons in this game. The game of Hiyāṅg is the greatest festival among the people. There is a Manipuri verse about the ignorance of a person. "Mi ashi hiyāṅg phāobdā udre" which means "This man is not seen even in Hiyāṅg festival." The citizens and common men who thronged to witness the game is proverbial. Two persons who were selected for the contest put on ancient Manipuri costume. They are known as hicongba (the chief rower) and take the chariot amidst the rounding of trumpets and drums. The hicongba stands in front of the boat with a paddle in hand and leads his seventy rowers. Each chief encourages his rowers by stamping violently with his right foot when the competition starts. The rowers put on uniform dress. They display their skill in the game. Enthusiastic spectators from a definite ṃañā were engaged to cheer,

75. Mutum Jhulon Singh, Viāyā Panchāli, pp.54-55; Ch.Pisak Singh, 'A Phase in Meithei Culture' L.M.S. Law College Magazine. It is edited by M. Kirti Singh in 1965.
steer and urge on the crow. When the first race is over, the two parties retire to their camp. After a while, the second race took place. It was declared closed after it. Some observers hold that the uproar of the crowd was very high and lead to serious fighting. The object of the race is "to foul the other and bore it into the bank." But this estimate does not carry our conviction. The king can separate the parties without any clash. It is meant for infusing the art of navigation into the people of Manipur. It is a religious festival where God is worshipped through boat race. This game is used with great caution.

The indoor game of kāng has been played by the people in the spring season (from Cheirāo to Rath-Yātrā). It is a game of two teams each of seven either males or females usually mixed up. It is associated with the creation story of Manipur and the change of season. A round object called kāng which is the seed of the creeper (Uri) is used in this game. It is about 1½ inches in diameter and about 1 of the inch in thickness. A player has to shoot a point from a fixed position. If the parties hit the target twice with the kāng, then lamtha is adopted. Lamtha is played by propelling the disk on its flat side along the surface of the ground by the force of the middle finger of the right hand acting of the finger of the left. At the end of half a duration of the play, interchange of directions takes place. Of the two teams the one who can hit the target for a

greater number by two chokheis (shooting from a standing position) and one lamtha is the winner. 78

Thabal-chongbi is a common game among the young men and women during the festival of Holi. The description of it is found in Chapter V.

There are some other sports like "tossing the caber," putting the stone, high kicking, sword play and spear play. The Meitheis are adepts in the use of sword and spear as a weapon of defence and attack in war. A king or a noble must be a well-trained person in this fighting. Display of fighting with swords and spears with shield and plumes betrays high degree of skill. 79 Vivid descriptions occur in Chalnaron that if nobles quarrelled they would resolve it by fight to the death. 80 Clearing the forest as well as the killing of tigers forms a special feature of these days. All male subjects are required to accompany the king in Kheda Chatpa, i.e., the catching of the elephant. So, this knowledge was compulsory for males. The use of birds in the Loktak lake for hunting is very common among the princes. 81 It is to be noted that bull fighting, hen fighting, pigeon fighting, and pony race are in vogue among the


79. Nandalal Sarma, Melirabak, pp.XXXIV-XXXV; W. Yumjao Singh, R.A.S.M., Bulletin No.1, Ch.III, pp.24-25. It is interesting to note that Manipuri cavalry was very famous in these centuries. They were armed with a long spear and a kind of dart called Arambāl in making cavalry charges. They are thrown in front and behind by the cavalry against the Burmese in wars.


81. Ethel St. Clair Grimwood, My Three Years in Manipur, pp.35-36, 60-66.
The amusements minimised the gulf between the Meitheis and tribal people. An official celebration called Merā Haochongba was carried out under the direction of kings. It is a one-day festival held in October in the palace where different Naga tribes participated in it. Wine and meat are distributed to them.83

The people had a clear concept of hygiene, good diet and sanitation. There was an institution in the palace for providing medical relief to the sick people. All sorts of elements to which human flesh is heir were treated by the physician. When a call is made to them, they gladly responded to it. From the chronicle, we know that common diseases most feared by the people were cholera and smallpox. They were of common occurrence and were considered the most severe ones during the reign of Chandrakirti. When the old method were proving ineffective, the physicians soon began incorporating into their treatment of the malady a few features of the European treatment. Great improvement had been made in the country through the application of vaccination for smallpox. The people have, as yet, to fight cholera. The fact that the population has been increased within a short time (since the devastation of Manipur) proved a high standard of health and hygiene which were found in the country.84

83. E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, pp.25-26; See Ch.II.
84. CK, pp.283-297 & 306; James Johnstone, My Experience in Manipur and Naga Hills, p.194; AARMA, 1873, p.17.
Village Organisation

The social life, as a whole, was one of peace and co-operation. Every village has an organisation of its own. It is an institution consisting of two elderly people with Gopāl Hanjabā and Gopāl Hidang. This organisation has the power of deciding dispute in divorce, maintenance of the child, adultery and religious practices. It has the power of fining and excommunicating people in the village. Its function is similar to the Gram Panchayat. In addition to its organisation every village has Singlup or wood club that looks after the welfare of the members. At the time of sickness and death of a person other members must be present at his house until the śrāddha is performed. Every member must subscribe some money known as Singyen for buying the fire wood for cremating the dead person. The problem of clearing the ground and constructing the pavilion for the ceremony are managed by them. The expenses connected with samskāras are met by the relatives and members of the Singlup. The furniture for constructing are equally shared among them. There are instances where friends of a bride build a room called Yaông-sang for the accommodation of the bride and bride-groom after the marriage. Sometimes Singlup was so far as to provide food and clothing to the wretched people for the sole purpose of giving them opportunities. Such functions are indicative of a relatively advanced social organisation.

86. E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, p.67.
87. See 85, 86.
Economic condition of the people

We now advert to the economic condition of the people. The people were engaged in agriculture. Variety of rice was the main crop. The art of cultivation was fairly advanced among them. There is mention of manuring and irrigation. The methods of transplantation were known to them during the reign of King Jayasimha. Domestic animals consist of cows, buffaloes and horses. Pigeons, ducks, pigs and hens are the favourite domestic animals of the Loi people. The bullocks must have been a common beast of ploughing and drawing the carts for transporting paddy from the field to the house. For the purpose of revenue collection, the land was divided into revenue free lands and revenue payable lands. The more important ones of the first kind are, Nimthem Lou, a land enjoyed by the king, Lairou, an endowment of land for the maintenance of some deities or temples, Lugun Lou, the gift of lands by the king to the Brahmans at the time of initiation, and lands granted to the favourites and relatives of the Raja and the officials for the whole of life or for some fixed years. The gifts were reverted to the king after the death of recipient and his wife. The villages of the Valley were classified into two kinds, Siphash village and

88. Upendranath Guha, Kachar er Itivrta, p.178; B. R. Pemberton, Report on the Eastern Frontier of India, pp.31-32. According to U. N. Guha, Kairen Kulappa, a certain prince of Rangamati, introduced the present transplantation method of paddy cultivation in Manipur. This view was ably refuted by some pandits in the local newspaper. Further research is needed.

Civilian village. In the first kind the king made gifts of a pari of lands to each inhabitant out of the surroundings free of revenue. In the latter, the civilian villages got a pari of land per head from the surrounding. Each inhabitant should pay the tax of one chengkok (20 seers) of rice annually. They have to attend the lallup for 10 days in every 40 days. The king appointed a revenue officer called Lourung Puren Achouba for the survey of land and collection of taxes. The headman of every village helps him in all matters connected with land cultivation and tax collection. According to Manipuri system, a tenant has to pay 12 pots of paddy per pari (2½ acres) per year to a pattadar for the cultivable land. The rent paid in kind in paddy per acre is known as lousal. The system of paying revenue in kind to the state was replaced by payment of five rupees per pari and a special tax of two rupees per house in April, 1892. Modern method of survey was introduced in 1897-98. The house tax was stopped in 1899-1900.

Spinning and weaving are the essential qualification for every Manipuri women. The chief material was cotton or silk. There was no separate professional weaver in Manipur. Certain families were associated with the making of designs and types of clothes in ancient days. Short staple cotton is grown in the hilly soils of Churachandpur and other hilly places in the

---

90. See fn. 90; J. Roy, History of Manipur, pp.168-169; T. C. Hodson, The Meithels, Section III.

91. See fn. 97 and Ch.II (Churachand's reign). I have given references about the modern method of general survey here to show that an S.D.C. was in-charge of land revenue. Chain survey and preparation of maps do not come within the scope of this thesis.
Industries

The process of spinning was old. The creativeness in their habit and tradition found expression in the designing of handloom and handicrafts. The products are as varied as to their tastes and needs. Fine yarns used by women were famous under the name of Tara Konbi and Manga Konbi. We can mention the Moirang-phi design with one inch solid border and one and a half inches of pyramidal figures to which geometrical and floral designs have been added. Embroidery design in silk on the border of phanek testified to the skill.

Silk industry was famous in Manipur. James Johnstone holds that silk manufacture was introduced by the Chinese settlers in Manipur in the 13th century. There is difficulty in accepting his view as we find the use of it in the local sources since the first century A.D. Silk worms are fed on the leaves of the mulberry tree. They are called Wainu and Lou by the Manipuris. Fine quality of silk is made from the worms. The chief centres of silk industry are Suchakameng, Sagonmang and Segmai on the northern borders of the Valley.

B. R. Pemberton, the Joint Commissioner of Manipur known to

---

92. B. C. Allen, District Gazetteers of Assam, Vol. IX, Part II, Shillong, 1905-7, Ch. on "Economic Condition". This chapter has been devoted to the methods of preparing clothes and industries of Manipur. My writing is based on it.

have visited these centres writes as follows: "Their silk manufactures, which are remarkable for their strength, and the brilliancy of their colours, are made up principally into petticoats, jackets and large scarfs, the last of which are only worn by the higher orders of the male sex; some of these scarfs are richly embroidered and though the work is coarse, they are highly prized in Awa." 94

The art of extracting the metals from ore and manufacturing objects were the primary industry of some section of the people. 95 They supported the society with their labour—the Thāngjams by doing the work of blacksmith, the Kāngabams, Tourāngbams and Keisams by doing the work of goldsmith and making ornaments of jewels and Aheibams by specialising in brass work. 96 The chief centre of iron work is Kakching, 28 miles to the south-west of Imphal. In the sliding scale of inferiority came the potters who were the Loi people. They followed their trade in making earthen jars and pitchers. The pottery is cheap and fine. The important centres are Andro, Chairen and Ningel. 97

Salt manufacture must have developed to a high degree of proficiency. There were as many as 80 salt wells (khong) in the Valley and hills of Manipur. The salt mines were concentrated in the hands of the king. He can give them away as a


95. See fn. 92 for the primitive and indigenous processes.

96. In ancient days certain families were associated with the making of designs and types of clothes. Similarly there were families devoting to the manufacture of different commodities.

97. See fn. 92.
reward to his nobles for the distinguished service to him. In the reign of the kings the industry was of considerable progress. The forced labourers were engaged in the works connected with the digging of wells and evaporation of salt.

The manufacture was discouraged owing to the scarcity of labourers and absolute system of production.

A conservative minded people think that use of foreign salt would result in the loss of caste. A restriction was imposed on the use of non-Meithei salt in feast, religious festivals and Samskaras. The important salt centres were Chandrakhong, Sikhong, Ningel and Waikhong.98

Manipur was noted for its tanning and leather works. Cattle-keeping was a special care of every Manipuri. A passage in Cheithārol Kumbābā indicates that the Manipuris made experiments for making the Pung (mridanga) from the hides of cows during the reign of Khuyoi Tompok. The non-slaughter measure adopted by the Vaisnava kings had very little effect for hides from animals which have died a natural death. From ancient times the Kabuis of Manipur Valley seem to have monopolised the trade of tanning, manufacture of shoes, leather bags and leather bottles. Sometimes the skin of tiger, elephant and mithun were in use. The ancient Meitheis applied a black varnish to the leather which they get

98. L. Ibungohal Singh, Introduction to Manipur, pp.79-81; B. R. Pemberton, Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India, 1960, pp.30-31; M. Jhulon Singh, Vilava Panchāli, pp.38-39. According to Pemberton, the salt procured from Waikhong is superior to that of other localities. The supply for the consumption comes from it. Salt is obtained from artificial evaporation.
from the juice of a tree called Yang. The tree is grown in the Kabaw Valley.

Sir Chandrakirti pays much attention to leather works, and is a patron of all who practice this work. He had sent Manipuri artisans for training to Kanpur. Sir James Johnstone who was the Political Agent at his time in the beginning of the 19th century was struck with the mechanical skill of the king. He observes "He had a great taste for mechanical arts of all kinds, and a vast fond of information which he had acquired from the Englishmen who came in contact with him. Scientific works were explained to him and his researches extended even to the anatomy of the human body, of which he had a very fair knowledge. He had a glass manufactured in his work shop, and once sent me (Johnstone) a petroleum lamp, every portion of which was made by his own artificers." 100

The industry of dyeing and dyeing have been well known to the Manipuris. All shades of colour were prepared from the herbs, flowers, barks and from the seeds of fruits. According to the Monograph on Dyes and Dyeing in Assam by A. Duncan, there were as many as 14 kinds of herbs and fruits from which different colours could be prepared. This is indicative of relatively advanced form of dyeing.

99. See fn. 92; L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, CK, pp.1-2. The Kabuis are known as Muchi people in Manipur. They live in the Imphal Valley. They are skinners, tanners and shoemakers. The Meithei people prepare mridanga (pung).

100. James Johnstone cited by J. Roy, History of Manipur, pp.105-106. The people from Kanpur introduced highly developed British goods into Manipur. Carpet design came more and more into use.
All colours except the black were not brilliant. Permanent black colour is prepared from the leaves of a plant called *Kum*, a bark of Kuki tree (*Cast-anopsis-specis*). A description of its process as practised by the people has this - *Kum* is a kind of vegetable dye which is obtained from *Kum* plant. By a process of fermentation, the leaves become an indigo coloured paste. By neutralising it with oyster shell ashes and the like, the colour is dyed to it.  

Among the industries, besides those already noted, there are expert carpenters, stone-masons, bamboo-workers, makers of basket and mat, boat makers, oil millers, dealers in corn, fishermen, makers of wine, flower-sellers, garland-makers and water-carriers. There were considerable progresses in the art of paper making for which she had self-sufficiency. Manipur achieved immense success in the production of sugar-cane and camphor.

The stability and simplicity is wrapped up in her village life. Each professional remained an organic whole. The idea of a common good bound together all groups within the society. Problem of unemployment was few and far between. Each of the group deals in nothing except in his own work. It also happens that one can change his profession and better one-self monetarily and rise in the social scale as a noble.


102. See fn. 92. The people of Lamangdong (Visnupur, 18 miles to the south-west of Imphal) have taken to the making of stone articles. The industry is very famous in Manipur.
Instances are on the record where families of blacksmith constituted solely a particular village. There are also instances of Thangjams moving from the iron producing centres (i.e. Kakching) to different parts of Manipur for the sake of lucrative employment though their work was hereditary.

Between the city and city and village and village, Singlup or Marup strengthened the economic solidarity of people and widened the contact. It ran the overall affairs of the village and saw to the enforcement of clearing the debt and fulfilment of contractual obligations. By the beginning of the 19th century kings of Manipur facilitated and fostered the industry of the country. The introduction of modern system by the help of European officers was a striking feature of the economic life of Manipur. 103

The list of exports and imports is very impressive. 104

The exports of Manipur in 1873-74 were Ivory, wax, silk, dyed yarn, mosquito curtain, saloo phanek, higok phanek, bed sheets, Maring phi, laiphi, chaddar, kumlang, phurit (black ready-made shirts), thouriphi, lai-veng (high class silk chadar), thread carpet, lasing phi (padded cloth), silk dhoti, silk phanek, buffaloes, ponies and elephants. Exports were divided into three categories, (1) Jungle products, i.e., ivory and wax (2) Textile products, i.e., handloom cloths and shirts and

103. E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, pp.68-69; also Sec. on Caste.
(3) Live-stock like buffaloes and ponies. Curiously enough, there is mention of the articles which are not allowed to be exported. They are - (1) Khamen Chatpa (printed silk dhoti), (2) Lamthang Khullak (Laced pugree) and (3) Nighouthou phi (a shirt like garment). Exports of cows and bullocks were banned.

The imports were Betel-nut, American cloth, long cloth, Mull Mull, Satin (Umbrella), Swiss cloth, steel, carpet, brass copper, thread, paper, soap, iron pan, nails, velvet, Shantipur dhoti, Joypoore chadar, woollen chadar (ektari), Umbrella, looking glass, hooka, dyes, spices, lace, buttons, sugar, tamarind, iron dao, axe, knife, padlock, saw, hammer, and needles. It also includes books, phials, bottles, shoes, namabali, Vrindaban brass stamps (Chappa), conches, hooka-stand, sandal wood, cards and wooden boxes.

There were marked regulations with which the duty on the economy was carried out. A duty was levied on all exports. Similarly, a duty was levied on imports except some articles. The main sources of revenue are import duties, export duties, sale of elephants in the Jiri forest, licence fee for cutting wood, bamboos and cane and kaliup system (a kind of tax paid in the form of labour).

Agriculture reached its full development in his time. Fruits and flowers of all kinds abound. Potatoes, Kalindri (a kind of beans), Koli hawai (French beans), hawai Asangbi (a kind of beans), egg-fruit, cucumber, pumpkin, voncek (monkey rice),
onion, chillies, peas (English), cabbage, cauliflower and pulses were the vegetable products in 1873. Rice and wheat are obtained sufficiently. The agricultural products of the hills were extensive. They bring credit to the economic management of the period. The contemporary account mentions opium as being grown to a limited extent in some places by the Muslim population.

Important Routes

War with Burma brought about the deadlock in the communication of Manipur. The kings after the termination of the conflicts took practical steps to improve the system. A remarkable development of the 18th and 19th centuries is the growth of cities all over the country. Bishenpur (Visnupur) was made the capital of Manipur which grew in extent. Other important capitals were Lāngthabāl and Sangālthen\textsuperscript{105} where King Jaysimha found to be a great centre of trade and administration. Most of the cities have been laid waste by the Burmese and some have been captured by them. Under the able kings, the commercial importance of these towns have been reoriented. From Imphal radiated several routes in different directions. Internal trade was carried on through these roads.

Another important feature of this period was the development of the Imphal-Dimapur Road, Imphal-Cachar Road, etc. We have

already noted the different hill routes which connected Manipur with Cachar and Sylhet as well with the Burmese territory. The routes were not safe from the tribes whose attack, plunder and looting were a menace to the travellers. Gambhir Singh suppressed them terribly. To hold them in check he established thannas at important places and forced them to pay tribute to him. By his drastic measures the people traversed the whole country with perfect safety.106

Trade Relations with the Outside World

We may conveniently refer to the subject of Manipur's trade relations with the outside world which was a source of revenue to the state. Early as far back as 2nd century B.C., we have the famous silk route which passed through Manipur connecting Afghanistan to China as indicated by Harvey and A. Phayre. The travellers were passing from one part to the other through it with openness of mind and breadth of vision. The concluding treaty of King Jaya Simha with the British East India Company throws an interesting light on the products and list of prices in 1763. It prominently mentions the use of gold coins as well as other metals. The principal products were silk, iron, cotton and wood, oil, wax, thread, elephant's tusk, camphor and Hecklee clothes. B. R. Pemberton's observation corroborates the

above statement. "During the reign of Choorjit Singh, a very brisk trade was carried on with the Burmese inhabitants of the frontier through the Kabo valley, and Chinese merchants from Yunnan used sometimes to visit Munipoor for purposes of traffic, bringing with them the same description of articles they take to Ava, and carrying away, in return, the wax, ivory, cloths, cotton, and ponies of the country." ¹⁰⁷

But the economic system was thrown out of gear by the invasion of the Burmans which reached its final stage in 1819. Famine and pestilence followed in the wake of numerous Burmese invasions from which Manipur did not recover for a while. Manipuri artisans had been deported by them to different parts of Burma. ¹⁰⁸ The Manipuri power grew with surprising rapidity under Gambhir Singh and his son Chandrakirti Singh in the nineteens and it happened that Manipur's trade and commerce was at its height during the time of Chandrakirti Singh.

Medium of Exchange

The system of trade and commerce brings us to the question of finance. It is generally maintained that barter economy was followed for a long time. It was common in the bazar till the 19th century. T. C. Hodson holds that coins

¹⁰⁷ B. R. Pemberton, Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India, pp. 34-35; King Gaurasyam's Treaty with the East India Company, 1762; also, supra, Ch.I, Sec.I.
¹⁰⁸ QK, p. 211; R. K. Jhalajit Singh, A Short History of Manipur, p. 151.
existed in Manipur since the days of Pakhambā in 33 A.D. He mentions eight varieties of *sells* with different shapes. McCulloch contends that Khagembā was the first king to issue a bell-metal coin in Manipur. 109

The meaning of the Manipuri word *sell* is money in general. It has also been considered to have meant the bell metal or bronze. As a technical term it means the coin. This term is used loosely and without reference to many layers of connotation in the 19th century economy.

A small coin and its fraction with the word 'Sri' is minted by the kings. The process of minting was primitive. 110 A particular Manipuri surname is engaged in the art of manufacturing *sells* and they were referred to as Seniams. A bell-metal *sell* weighed the equivalent of 16 grams. The market value of coin was equal to nearly 500 to one British rupee in the second half of the 19th century. 111 We have small coins bearing the word 'Rama', the significance of which is not established, but probably included the practice of Ramānandi sect of Vaisnavism during the time of Garibniwāz.


111. See fn. 109.
Coins issued by King Jayasimha are smaller than that of his predecessors. A small silver piece of round form which is equivalent to and weighing about the British rupee has been circulated by King Chourjit Singh in about 1815 (vide Ch. VII in connection with Chourajit Singh).

Dr R. Brown holds that there was no evidence of use of gold coins in Manipur although King Jayasimha's treaty with the East India Company in the 18th century suggested that gold coins had existed. In saying this, he was thinking more of the earlier than the later development of finance in the 19th century. When we depict the later financial condition, his view cannot be maintained on the discovery of gold coins which is issued by King Gambhir Singh. 112

Manipuri sell comes into its own in the middle of the 19th century. The British attempt to introduce copper coins was at that time unsuccessful, since the women of the country refused to accept the large quantity of copper coins. The sell and the British rupee were in free circulation side by side. 113

Of the value of sell in terms of commodities we have no definite knowledge, nor the records yield any data on which a plausible hypothesis could be built. One senmakhāl (a kind of coin current in Manipur) enables one to purchase salt which can


113. See fn. 109.
be eaten by ten men. A noble of the court in the 19th century used to get 3 sell lakh (Rs. 1) per month and purchased 120 sangbaigs of paddy for an average family. This is the lowest wage given to a man. They can get a supply of food for six months by this amount.

Money Lending and Mortgage

Society indicates a trend strong enough to be worthy of close study. Financial machinery includes debts, loans and mortgage. A man can mortgage his own wife to induce faith in the mind of the creditor for a sum of money which was required by him. Debtors were imprisoned or enslaved by the creditors. The debtor has to serve the money lender till the debt is worked off. A quotation from Capt. E. W. Dun gives us a clue to the rules regarding the rates of interest. "His services thus are credited as an interest on the original debt although it does not follow that the original debt is in all cases taken, a greater or less sum may be taken as may be agreed upon." 114

Housing condition of the people

As regards the living house, the princes built houses of stone, wood and brick. The condition of the masses of people living in the towns and villages was much the same as at present.

They are very conservative in respect of the shapes, patterns and details as written in the Cheitharol Kumbāba and records of house building. A conception of the happy houses have open verandah, the high eaves and foot-stopped roof point. A typical living house was 50 feet in length and 17 in breadth. They are pleasant with two dividing lines, i.e., phumlel (Phamlel) and ningon and many rooms for fire side, deities and members. There are cowshed, graneries and frontal-huts attached to every house. In front of the house there is the courtyard where the sacred tulasi leaves grow. The construction of a house is in keeping with the social and domestic notions of the Meitheis and it follows the plan of human body. If a European puts his foot upon the plinth of the house, it is abandoned. The idea was that the Europeans were untouchable to the Vaisnava according to the courtesy of the religious nature. We have from the local sources ceremonial kindling of fire for the first time in a newly-built house without which a man is not allowed to enter his house. 115

The furniture used by the masses consists generally of timber, wood, bamboo, cane, thatching grass, mud, reeds and straw. It is to be noted in this connection that the houses were made of combustable materials in these ages.

We have a good account of utensils and implements which are used by the people. By most, they are prepared from earthenwares, woods, bamboos and metals. The kings and nobles profusely

use utensils which are lavishly ornamented with gold and silver. It is certain that manufacture of their articles was developed in Manipur in about the 18th and 19th centuries.

Conclusion

The above is the socio-economic background against which Manipur originated and developed until the British conquered it. There were various racial groups who came to Manipur in different periods. They are (1) Mongoloid (the Shans, the Burmans and the Chinese), (2) Proto-Nordic (Aryans-Kassites and Mitannis), (3) Dravidian, (4) Austric. Each contributed something to its society. The Mongoloid contribution to its culture was silk, terraced cultivation, betel-nut culture and brick-making. The Proto-Nordic contribution was the reering of cattle, use of iron implements, the best variety of corn, drink, the patriarchal institution and also the sense of orderly feeling (custom and manners). The most important share was the language and script.

The Dravidian contribution gave the water transport, pottery, religious conception, i.e., worship of goddesses and we have to acknowledge the Dravidian source in music.

The Austrics were responsible for the cult of totemistic rites, exorcism, taboos and magical potency.

116. See infra Ch. I, Sec. I (The People); R. M. Nath, The Background of Assamese Culture, pp.86-87.
The essential Indianness with which they have reckoned in later ages was in vogue since the beginning of the 15th century. Cultural synthesis was in the offing definitely in these eras. The Kuki, Nagas and the Muhammadans who came to Manipur were accommodated within the geographical and economic set-up of the people. The majority community had to make room for the minorities in their Manipuri community. This is a society in which the minority community did not suffer from inferiority complex. But intercourse and inter-dining with them was prohibited in order to preserve the racial purity of the Meitheis. They were governed by their own codes and status. Persons transgressing the codes were ex-communicated.

The Meitheis society was organised and stratified since the Vaiṣṇavisation of the country and in the 18th and 19th centuries. The efforts had to be made in maintaining its rigidity. The Hindu concept of Varna obtained the sanction of these centuries. This tendency gives rise to the characteristic feature of Meitheism, i.e., the concept of vek (sālāi) flourishing side by side with the Hindu concept of caste and sapinda.
