PART I

GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND
CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF MANIPUR

The present state of Manipur occupies a considerable tract of land in the extreme northeastern part of India. It is predominantly a mountainous country but in its central part it includes a small plain of alluvial filling (Map 1). This plain land is very thickly populated. It is the nucleus of political and economic activities. Imphal, the capital of the state, is situated in the northern part of the plain. Since distant past, it has been the seat of political power in Manipur. The present state of Manipur is situated between 23°50' North and 25°41' North latitudes and 93°2' East and 94°47' East longitudes. The total geographical area of Manipur is 22355 square kilometres, which is about 0.68 per cent of India. The total population of the state, according to A.D. 1971 census is 10,72,753 which is 0.19 per cent of India's population. Manipur occupies the twentieth position among the states of India in respect of population.

I. EVOLUTION OF MANIPUR

Mythological Background

According to Manipuri Puranas (mythology), in the beginning everything was under water. Nine Laipumthou (gods) and seven Lainuras (goddesses), all working together made sixty four hillocks. Thus, they created the land. Then Lord Shiva with his consort Parvati
landed atop the Nongmaijing Hill to play Rasa Leela\(^1\) in the valley of Manipur, which he found still submerged under water. Lord Shiva with his trident made a hole through the hills and provided an outlet for the excess water, which gradually drained out and the valley of Manipur emerged into being.

The Puranas trace the royal lineage of Manipur from Babhruvahana, the son of chivalrous Arjuna, one of the Pandavas. Mahabharata mentions that Arjuna was banished for twelve years for trespassing into the private apartment when his elder brother Yudhisthira was with Draupadi. During the period of this penance, Arjuna happened to visit this beautiful valley of Manipur, in the course of his wanderings. Here he married Chitrangada, the daughter of the King, and had a son, Babhruvahana by name. He married another girl, named Ulupi, who was the daughter of a tribal chief. He had a son by her, called Ilawanta.

After the battle of Kurukshetra, Yudhisthira performed the Ashwamedha or the Horse Sacrifice. Following the sacrificial horse, Arjuna went to many places including Kalinga, that is the present Orissa. From there he moved eastward along the sea shore and came to Manipur once again. The episode appears probable in the light of geographical facts. The shore line, which, at present is in Sundarbans, must have been far north at that time. The Kshatriya prince moving eastward from Kalinga, following the sea shore, might have come towards the Surma valley where the Gangetic plain ends abruptly. For him the

\(^1\)Rasa Leela is a religious dance drama.
most inviting place would have been, once again, the valley of Manipur. In this way, are Manipuri and Hindu mythologies linked together.

In the distant past the country was called Mahendra Pur or Mahendra Pahar, which might have been the name of Nongmaijing hill, a hill very close to the east of the capital. It is claimed that it was Babhruvahana who changed the name of the country to Manipur, for having come into the possession of a jewel which once belonged to a Naga Raja or Serpent King.²

From the very beginning Manipur has been characterised by geographical isolation. The mountain ranges, separating the plains of India and Burma, run roughly north-south, and as such, act as great barriers for east-west communication. However, there are a few mountain passes through which mountain trails run, which in the past, were the only lines of communication. Of these routes, mention may be made of the one through Chaukan pass, connecting the blind end of Brahmaputra valley in upper Assam with the Hukawng valley of upper Burma. A little to the south, there was Tuzu gap route which connected the plain of Chindwin river in upper Burma with that of Surma river in Bengal, passing through the valley of Manipur. The route through An pass connected central Burma with the Chittagong coast of Bengal. Further south, the Taungup pass route provided a line of communication between lower Burma and Arakan coast.³

Of all these routes, the one through Tuzu gap was most important and widely used. It virtually served as an international highway of commerce. It had the advantage of passing through the Manipur valley, which offered a local market and a place for break of journey, roughly midway across the mountainous path, between upper Burma and Bengal. For Manipur, it served as the highway for exchange of ideas and commodities. It is also claimed that it was used for international trade from second century B.C. Through this route, commodities from China and Burma, especially silk and jade, went to the markets of Middle East and Europe.4

In the pre-historic times, Aryans who had entered into the plains of India in the Punjab, moved eastward in search of newer lands for colonisation. The Ganga-Brahmaputra plain ends in Cachar in the east. Their movement further eastward was impeded by geographical barriers in the shape of a succession of north-south ranges clad with dense forests, which most effectively separated the Ganga-Brahmaputra plain from that of upper Burma. The route across these mountains passed through Manipur linking Jirighat-Khoupum valley-Bishenpur-Palel-Tamu.

It appears that in pre-historic times this valley was originally inhabited by primitive tribes of Mongoloid stock, with a small percentage of population scattered in the surrounding hills. In course of time they came in contact with another race - the Aryans.

Waves of Aryan colonisers moved eastward in a series, passing through Manipur, penetrating deep into the remotest parts of Burma.

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They moved in search of newer lands for colonisation and establishment of regal power. The hordes comprised able-bodied martial men, brave and enterprising, and were commanded by ambitious princes or heroes of extraordinary chivalry. They married local women, and their children assimilated themselves to the local populace. It is believed that the route by which the Indian colonists arrived in Burma passed through Manipur.  

The growing contact of the people in the Manipur valley, with the Aryans of the west led to the fusion of the two cultures and civilisations and today this small tract of land is rightly proud of this rich cultural heritage. The various tribes surrounding the valley (not yet converted to Christianity), still worship their various deities, and know not of Aryan gods, whereas in the valley some of these deities, were identified with the Vedic gods like Agni, Indra, Varuna etc. The valley people have not entirely done away with their pre-Aryan deities, nor the practices associated with them.

They retain much of their old customs and traditions together with some of the Vedic ones. We find mention of the custom of Gandharva marriage that is marriage by mutual consent in the Puranas. This is almost extinct in India, but is still in practice to some extent in Manipur. The rigid and water-tight caste system of India, the very crux of Hindu society, could not find a place in Manipuri society. But Gotra or salais meaning clan, can be traced as descending from generations. In all probability this is an impact of Aryan culture.

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Much as in Vedic way of worship, there were priests and priestesses in Manipur called Maiba and Maibee to worship different gods except fire. They believed in oracles. Later on, from the eighth century onward, some Puranic gods too started getting worshipped. During an excavation conducted by Yumjao Singh a copper plate was unearthed. The plate bears inscriptions in Devanagari which testify to the fact that the Manipuris worshipped Hari as the supreme God besides others, like Shiva, Devi, Ganesha and Vishwakarma.\(^6\) It may safely be concluded that the influence of Aryan culture was steadily growing as time passed. This facilitated the spread of Vaishnavism in the following centuries.

Colonel Gerini, in his researches on Ptolemy's geography, mentions Manipur as a country close to upper Burma. The Burmese chronicles mention Manipur as a border kingdom within the basin of Irrawaddi. Accounts of Hiuen Tsang refer to Manipur as a part of the kingdom of Kamrupa. These things establish the existence of Manipur as a state from very early times.

The early history of Manipur is lost in obscurity. But its favourable geography is conducive to the development of a compact and organised society, mainly concentrated in the valley. Some of the important factors for the same are: (1) its isolation, (2) the series of mountains surrounding the valley, (3) a viable central plain, (4) the concentration of population in the plain, (5) the sparse

population in the surrounding hills, and (6) the remoteness of this region from the plains of Bengal, Assam and upper Burma. The valley is geographically ideal for being the seat of political power. It is one of those small states that have survived diverse vicissitudes of history and made significant contribution to human culture. It may be concluded that it had been in existence and significantly as an independent kingdom from a very early period. It was perhaps an oasis of culture in the midst of tribes inhabiting the hills.7

According to ancient Manipuri literature the country extended far beyond its present frontiers. Some portion of present Burma was then within the confines of Manipur. It touched the borders of Burma and China to the east and north-east; to the south it extended up to the sea; to the north it stretched up to the kingdom of Hidimbapur; and to the west it brushed the Barak river.

The size of the kingdom, however, has fluctuated from time to time according to the fortune of the rulers. Sometimes the kingdom extended three or four days' journey east of Wingthee or Chindwin in upper Burma. At other times, only the Kabaw valley was included in the kingdom.8 The strip of land between the present boundary of Manipur and the Chindwin river is known as Kabaw valley. It is inhabited by Shans and not by the Burmese. This valley, for its rich teak planta-

tions, has always remained a bone of contention between Manipur and Burma.9

The inhabitants of the valley of Manipur call themselves Meitei. As early as the first century A.D. they were divided into seven clans, who came from different directions and occupied a portion of the valley each. They formed their own principalities. One of these clans was called Ningthouja. The other clans were Sarangleisangthem, Khaba Ngaba, Luwang, Khumel, Angom and Moirang. They struggled for supremacy amongst themselves. The Ningthoujas subdued the other clans. This culmination was a long and arduous process which entailed nearly twelve centuries.10 It virtually effected the absorption of all the clans into one, so that the name Meitei now stands for the composite society as a whole, but the seven clans distinctly exist still.11

Historical Background

The history of the valley of Manipur and the surrounding hills cannot be traced in much detail in its obscure past. The political condition that prevailed in the pre-Christian era has not been maintained by the rulers so amply. For most of our conclusions we have to depend upon tradition, custom and usage, folk lore and similar items. It is difficult to ascertain the form of government prevailing before eighth

9Johnstone, loc. cit.
10Jhalajit Singh, op. cit., p. 45.
11Ibid., p. 15.
century A.D. But it is believed that some form of monarchy must have prevailed during the period.  

In the chronicles of adjoining kingdoms some mention of Manipur is available as a passing reference, but the information is too meagre to give a coherent picture of the period. In the chronicles of Pong Shan, it is stated that Samlong, a Pong prince, had been to Tripura on a military expedition and happened to cross the valley of Manipur on his way back in A.D. 777. He found the inhabitants of the valley too poor to exact tribute from them.  

The history of the land, according to the State Royal Chronicles, appears to be almost uneventful. There is conspicuous absence of major wars as well as great personalities as kings. A modest kingdom of happy and prosperous people having trade and other relations, with the adjoining kingdoms, cannot be ruled out. The tempo of prosperity appears to have been slow but steady. So, towards the eighteenth century the king of Manipur is found invading the territory of Burma and creating almost a panic at Ava, the capital of the country.  

For reliable information on the history of this kingdom, the most authoritative source is the State Royal Chronicles called Cheitharol Kumbaba, which maintains an account of major events like war, accession, death of kings etc. The Wingthourol Lambuba gives an account of the queens of Manipur.

12 Johnstone, loc. cit.  
13 Pemberton, op. cit., p. 144.  
The recorded history of Manipur, as traced in Cheitharol Kumbaba begins with the accession of Pakhangba on the throne of Manipur in A.D. 53. He subdued his enemies and laid the foundations of a kingdom on a firm basis. His descendants ruled till A.D. 1891, when Manipur passed under British Paramountcy. From that time up to A.D. 1947, Manipur was a part of British India with a sort of home rule, granted by the British. After A.D. 1947, following the merger of native states, Manipur became a Part C state, and later, in A.D. 1964, a Union Territory. On January 21, 1972, it became a full-fledged Indian state, at par with others.

Pre-British period. The old social order which had taken root in the early centuries, continued up to the middle of the eleventh century. King Loiyamba (A.D. 1074-1122) was a great reformer of Manipur. He put an end to the old social order and ushered in a new one. For efficient administration he divided the valley into six circles, locally known as Panas. He introduced the division of labour and assigned a particular occupation to a particular Yunnak or family, in order to regulate effectively different trades and crafts.

He realised the necessity of a large and permanent labour force for undertaking various development schemes in the interest of the people, for example, draining of marshes, dredging of river beds, building embankments and roads etc. He introduced Lallup or forced labour, making it obligatory for every individual to work for ten days.

\[15\] Jhalajit Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
out of every forty days for the state. This system, in spite of certain defects, proved of vital socio-economic significance to the people of Manipur. It worked for about eight centuries and was abolished only by the British in A.D. 1891, having been replaced by a house tax of rupees two per homestead (family). 16

Manipur was at the Zenith of its power during the reign of king Gharib Niwaz (A.D. 1709-1748). He led several expeditions against the Burmese and plundered their territory. It may be recalled here that Manipur had certain strategic advantages over its neighbouring rival Burma. The capital in central Burma was very far from the common border. On the other hand, the centre of Manipur power was entrenched in the valley just on the other side of the water parting, and being duly fortified by mountain ranges it was all the more invincible. It was easier for Manipur to launch an offensive on upper Burma from its base in Kabaw valley, but not as easy for the Burmese to defend their territory.

After the death of Gharib Niwaz the power of Manipur greatly declined between A.D. 1755 and A.D. 1826. During this period Manipur suffered from a series of Burmese invasions, as well as from internal dissensions. This is known as the dark period of Manipur. The war with Burma flared up in A.D. 1819, when king Marjit allowed his people to cut timber in Kabaw valley. It was a long drawn war. This time Burma was better equipped and she aimed at complete devastation of Manipur, by

16 Ibid., p. 59.
burning the standing crops and settlements and driving the cattle and manpower to work in the fields of Burma. However, Gambhir Singh, with British assistance succeeded in driving out the Burmese from the Kabaw valley.

The war came to an end by the Treaty of Yandabo, signed on February 24, 1826. According to this treaty Gambhir Singh's title to the throne of Manipur was recognised. The nature of his suzerainty was not clarified. Major Burney, Resident at Ava, was asked to report the sentiments of the Burmese on this point. The Burmese did not demand suzerainty over Manipur, but they claimed the Kabaw valley as an integral part of Burma, and refused to make any concession on this point. Major Burney submitted a confidential report in favour of the Burmese claim. In A.D. 1834, the Government of India conceded the Kabaw valley to Burma and agreed to the boundary line at the foot of Yoomadoung hills. As a compensation, Government of India agreed to give the Raja a stipend of rupees five hundred per month which continued until the integration of Manipur with the Indian Union.

British rule. The British influence had a slow and steady rise in Manipur between A.D. 1825 and A.D. 1891. Manipur acted as an independent kingdom under the sphere of British influence. The British Government treated Manipur as an independent but protected state lying outside its borders. During this period Manipur enjoyed a position almost similar to that of the present border state of Sikkim. In A.D. 1885, the Manipur ruler signed the treaty of Yandabo, which recognised British suzerainty. The Manipur ruler continued to rule until A.D. 1891, when he was deposed by the British government.

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1833, Government of India gave the strip of land known as Jiribam to Gambhir Singh and accepted the line of Jiri river and western bend of Barak river as the boundary between Manipur and British India.

The Political Agency was opened here in A.D. 1835 and it continued to function up to A.D. 1891. It had the effect of guaranteeing safety against external aggression. It, however, did take little note of internal troubles. As a result during A.D. 1834–1866, there were more than thirteen attempts on the throne, most of them by the Manipuri princes in Cachar. There were two attempts at revolution from within.

In A.D. 1851, the British Government instructed the Political Agent to guide the Raja in his administrative affairs and also to see that the people of Manipur were not oppressed by the Raja. This meant wider powers for the Political Agent. From A.D. 1851 to A.D. 1890, the Political Agent discharged his obligation of advising the king in the internal affairs, which made the king and his ministers suspicious on occasions.

In A.D. 1886–87 there were conspiracies to dislodge Swarchandra Singh from the throne. But these moves were put down with British help. The internal dissensions, however, continued. In the following years, when Grimwood was the Political Agent, things took a serious turn, culminating in the Palace Revolt of A.D. 1890, and leading to the disaster of A.D. 1891. Manipur lost its independence. It went directly under British control.

The Government of India, however, considered the moral right of Manipur to exist as a State and reconceded the same to it as notified
in the Gazette of India No. 1700E, dated August 21, 1891. Churachand Singh was selected as the king of Manipur. This system worked till the lapse of British Paramountcy in India on August 15, 1947.\footnote{R.K. Birendra Singh (comp.), \textit{District Census Handbook of Manipur} (Imphal : Government of Manipur, 1964), pp. 14-15.}

\textbf{Since independence}. After the World War II, India passed through some political upheaval. In response to a countrywide demand for independence the British decided to quit India by the fifteenth of August 1947. The Government of India was succeeded by the Dominions of India and Pakistan. The native states were called upon to enter into political adjustment with the successor Government or Governments.

The political leaders of Manipur began to demand representative government. Manipur, thus, was faced with two problems namely to adjust itself as a native state to the Dominion Government of India as others, and to promote the growth of democratic institutions within the state according to the wishes of the people. In A.D. 1947, the Maharaja formed a body to frame a constitution for Manipur. For the first time a Government was formed by the elected representatives of the people.\footnote{J. Roy, \textit{History of Manipur} (Calcutta : Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1959), p. 162.}

Since the attainment of Indian independence, Sardar Patel, the Home Minister then, had been trying for the integration of native states into the Indian Union. Many states were merged together to form a big state or a Part B state. In this process most of the states lost their identity for ever. However, some of the states were allowed to maintain their individual identity and territorial integrity due to
their strategic position. Such states were kept in the category of Part C states, to be governed by Chief Commissioners, Manipur was kept in this category. Thus, it passed under the direct control of the central government at New Delhi. 21

The instrument of merger was signed by the Maharaja on September 21, 1949, and the state was taken over by the Government of India on October 15, 1949, with clear understanding that the Indian Government would be competent to exercise power, authority and jurisdiction in such manner and through such agency as it might think fit. 22 Manipur became a full-fledged Indian state in A.D. 1972 according to a proclamation by the President of India, which reads thus:

"Whereas by virtue of the provisions of the North Eastern Area (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 (81 of 1971) a new State of Manipur is formed on this the 21st day of January 1972." 23

II. REORGANISATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE SET UP

The state of Manipur is bounded on the north by Nagaland, on the south by Mizoram and Burma, on the east by Burma and on the west by Assam. The oval shaped central plain has an area of about 1765 square kilometres, and is situated in the middle. Out of about 855 kilometres

constituting the boundary of the state, approximately a length of 352 kilometres forms the international boundary with Burma (Map 2).

The state is administered by a Governor. There is a sixty-member Legislative Assembly of the elected representatives of the people. The majority party selects a Council of Ministers for the purpose of administration. For administrative convenience the state has been divided into five Revenue districts namely Manipur North, Manipur West, Manipur Central, Manipur South and Manipur East. Manipur North district has been further divided into two Autonomous districts namely Manipur North Autonomous district and Sadar Hills Autonomous district. Manipur Central district has been further divided to carve out the Tengnoupal Autonomous district. The districts covering hill areas have Autonomous status. Thus, in all, there are seven districts, six of which are Autonomous districts. Each district is under the charge of a Deputy Commissioner. In each of the Autonomous hill districts there is a District Council consisting of eighteen elected representatives of the people to care for the development work.24 A very peculiar feature of the recent reorganisation is that the Manipur Central district includes in itself a geographically non-contiguous tract of land, namely the subdivision of Jiribam, far to the west, lying beyond Manipur West district. This is done on the basis of linguistic and cultural affinity.

The districts are further divided into subdivisions. There are twenty five subdivisions in all. For economic development the state is divided into development blocks. In the plain land the blocks are called Community Development Blocks, whereas in the hills they are known as Tribal Development Blocks. The boundary of each block coincides with that of the subdivision except in case of Imphal West subdivision where there are two blocks. Thus in all there are twenty six blocks (Map 3). It is hoped that this reorganisation will help in removing the economic disparity between the hill land and the plain land and accelerate the economic prosperity of the state.