Chapter Two

THE MANIPURI PEOPLE AND MANIPURI LANGUAGE
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THE MANIPURIS (MEETEIS) IN INDIA:

The Manipuris are mainly inhabited in Manipur. But we found there are large numbers of the Manipuris in different parts of India. Presently, India has total 28 States and 7 Union Territories, out of this total except in the two Union Territories (Daman & Diu and Lakshadweep) all the States and Union Territories of India are inhabited by the Manipuri People. In India, the total number of people who speaks Manipuri as their mother tongue numbers is 14,66,705 out of which 12, 66, 098 (Census of India, 2001) speakers reside in Manipur. According to Census of India, 2001 outside Manipur, the highest Manipuri inhabited state is Assam. There are total numbers of 1, 54,059 Manipuri speakers in Assam (Census of India, 2001) and this figure may be varied. And lowest Manipuri inhabited state is Chhattisgarh and Union Territory is Pondicherry respectively. Looking to world context, there is Manipuri speakers in Bangladesh and Myanmar as well. The Manipuri population was 6000 in Myanmar in 1931 and 92, 800 in Bangladesh in 1982 as reported in the http://www.ethnologue.com. The following table-2.1 clearly shows all the details information about Manipuri speakers’ population in India.

Table-2.1
Manipuri Speakers in India, Census of India, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>India/States/Union Territories</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Andaman &amp; Nicobar Islands</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>1210</td>
<td>810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>1,54,059</td>
<td>77,350</td>
<td>76,709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chandigarh</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chhattisgarh</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dada &amp; Nagar Haveli</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Daman &amp; Diu</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>1210</td>
<td>810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Goa</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>95</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Himachal Pradesh</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Jammu &amp; Kashmir</td>
<td>977</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE MANIPURIS IN NORTH-EAST INDIA:

Northeast India is a region between Eastern region in India and Purbanchal Range - an Eastward extension of the Himalayas in the Northern belt of India that primarily consists of all the regions that have been engraved out of the original Province of Assam of British India. North East India previously comprises of seven states commonly known as the ‘Seven Sisters’. But recently by including with Sikkim State it comprises Eighth States and instead of its previous name it was known as the ‘Eighth Sisters’. They are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and former Princely States of Manipur and Tripura. Apart from these, more recently as a part of Greater Northeast India, state of Skkim and parts of North Bengal (districts of Darjeeling, Jalsaigiri and Koch Bihar) can also be collectively referred as Northeast India. The North East is a true frontier region. It has over 2000 km of border with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and is connected to the rest of India by a narrow 20 kms wide corridor of land.\(^1\) One of the most ethically and linguistically diverse regions in Asia, each state has its distinct cultures and traditions.

\(^1\) Retrieved from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia accessed on 21/09/2012
During the entire British colonial period in India, North East India was ruled as a part of Bengal Province. The state of Assam came into existence in 1874. After the Indian Independence from British rule in 1947, the Northern region of British India consisted of Assam and the princely states of Manipur and Tripura. Subsequently, Nagaland in 1963, Meghalaya in 1972, Arunachal Pradesh in 1975 and Mizoram in 1987 were formed out of Assam. Manipur and Tripura remained as Union Territories of India between 1956 until 1972 when they attained fully-fledged statehood. Sikkim was integrated as the eighth North Eastern Council state in 2002. The city of Shillong acted as the capital of the Assam province created during the British Rule. It remained as the capital of undivided Assam until formation of the state of Meghalaya in 1972. The capital of Assam was then shifted to Dispur, a part of Guwahati, and Shillong became the capital of Meghalaya.

The Manipuris have been living in North-East India from ancient time. Time of their settlement in the region is differing from states to states within Northeast India itself. The details information about their settlement in the major populated states of the region will discuss differently in different states i.e. Assam, Manipur and Tripura.

**THE MANIPURI SPEAKERS IN NORTH-EAST INDIA:**

According to the Census of India, 2001 total population of the North Eastern region is 3,90,35,582 and out of this total there are total 14,55,390 Manipuri speaking population in the region. Among the states of the NE region, Manipur state has the highest Manipuri speakers in the region and in India also. Sikkim has the lowest speakers in the region. There are plenty of Manipuri speakers in all the states of the region. The following table-2.2 will show the details information about total number of Manipuri speakers in North-East India region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>State/ Region</th>
<th>Total Population of the State</th>
<th>Total Manipuri Population of the State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Northeast India</td>
<td>39,035,582</td>
<td>1,455,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>1,091,117</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>26,638,407</td>
<td>154,059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>2,388,634</td>
<td>1,266,098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Meghalaya</td>
<td>2,306,069</td>
<td>3522</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE MANIPURIS IN MANIPUR:

Manipur, once an independent Asiatic state is situated in India's Northeastern region. She is one of the Eighth states of Northeast India. The state is bound by Cachar and North Cachar districts of Assam on the west, Kohima and Phek districts of Nagaland on the North, and Aizawl district of Mizoram on the South-East. Its entire Eastern border is shared with Myanmar. It is also the gateway of India to Southeast Asia through the Moreh Town of Manipur passing through National Highway 39 (Indo-Burma Road). Topographically it is divided into centrally situated Imphal valley (Tam), the foot Hills (Loyalam) and the surrounding hill (Ching) districts.

The valley constitutes about one-tenth of the total area while the hill consist of the remaining portion. The State capital of Manipur is Imphal. The State lies at latitude of 23°83'N – 25°68'N and longitude of 93°03'E – 94°78'E. The total area covered by the state is 22,347 km². The capital lies in an oval-shaped valley of approximately 700 square miles (2,000 km²) surrounded by blue mountains and is at an elevation of 790 meters above the sea level. The slope of the valley is from north to south. The presence of the mountain ranges not only prevents the cold winds from the north from reaching the valley but also acts as a barrier to the cyclonic storms originating from the Bay of Bengal.

In olden days, the native home land of Manipuris was called as Meitrabak, Kangleibak, and was known by a dozen of names. It could be identified from the period of first king Meidingu Pakhangba (33-154 A.D) till the rule of Meidingu Charairongba (1697-1709). Besides, Manipur is known by different names at the different period of time by her neighbours, which term they equally applied to the Manipuri people. For example, the Burmese called the land of Manipur as ‘Kathe’; the Cacharis as ‘Moglie’; the Assamese as ‘Meklee’; and the Shans called it ‘Cassay’. Similarly, Manipuris had given different names to the outsiders. They know

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2 Retrieved from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia on 21/09/2012
4 Rajendra Kshetri, The Emergence of Meetei Nationalism, Mittal, New Delhi, 2006, p. 28
Tripura as Takhen; Assam as Tekhao; Cachar as Mayang leibak; China as Khagi; and Burmese as Kabo, Pong and Ava which apply to the different regions of the kingdom of Burma in different times.

The Manipuris settling both in the hills and the plains are Mongoloids, speaking diverse sub branches of the Tibeto-Burman language. They are believed to have migrated from south West China, the region between the upper courses of the Yangtze and Hwang Ho before Christian era and entered north-eastern parts of the Indian sub-continent in successive waves. But till now, there are no reliable records about when and how these people had moved out from their original homeland. Though several manuscripts speak of the existence of organized society and the glorious reign of successive kings from the hoary past, the royal chronicle ‘Cheitharol Kumbaba’ records the history of these people from the early part of the first century A.D only. The first historical reference made to this land is in a Shan (‘Pong’ to the Manipuris) chronicle when Samlongpha, the younger brother of Sukhampha, the Pong (Burma) King visited Manipur in the eighth century. The Manipuris chronicle also registers this account though at variance by a few years.5

Manipur is a place where different waves of races and culture met through the ages, which ultimately mingled together. The territory is divided into two distinct zones - the valley and the surrounding hill areas. The valley is mostly inhabited by the Meeteis, which include the Seven clan’s people, the Manipuri Brahmins, the Manipuri Muslims, the Lois and various other small communities. The hill areas are inhabited by the hills tribes like the Aimol, Anal, Angami, Chiru, Chohte, Gangte, Hmar, Kabui, Kcha Naga, Koirao, Koireng, Kom, Lamgang, Mao, Maram, Maring, Mizo, Moyon, Paite, Parum Ralte, Sema, Simte, Sahte, Tangkul, Thdon, Vaiphu and Zou etc.6

The four districts namely Bishnupur, Thoubal, Imphal East and Imphal West are in the valley areas of Manipur State. And other five districts namely Churachandpur, Chandel, Ukhrul, Senapati and Tamenglong are in the hill areas of the State. According to Census of India, 2001, the state has 22, 93,896 persons (0.21% of Country’s total population). Of this total 17, 17,928 live in the rural and the remaining 5, 75,968 are live in the urban areas according to the Census of India, 2001. Of this total, 58.9% live in the valley and the remaining 41.1% in the hilly region.

THE MANIPURI SPEAKERS IN MANIPUR:

Manipur is the resident soil of the Manipuris. According to Census of India, 1991 out of total population 18,37,149 of the state, there are 11,10,134 Manipuri speakers in the state. And according to 2001 out of the total population 22,93,896 of the state, there are 12,66,098 Manipuri speakers in the state. The Meeteis, the major inhabitants of the valley, constitute 57% of the state’s total population but form more than 70% of the valley population.

THE MANIPURIS IN ASSAM:

The migration of the Manipuris from their own homeland Manipur and their settlement at different places in the different periods of time in Assam’s Barak Valley and Bramhaputra Valley and Surma Valley (presently in Bangladesh) are the zenith of a long process of events and circumstances.

THE MANIPURIS SETTLEMENT IN BARAK VALLEY AND BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY:

BARAK VALLEY:

The entire Barak Valley was referred to as Cachar in the earlier time, although at present, Cachar is one of the districts of the three districts of the valley- Karimganj and Hailakandi being the other two districts. In the post-independence period Cachar acquired another name the ‘Barak Valley’ after the name of the principal river ‘Barak’ of this region. However, in the year 1983, Karimganj and in the year 1989, Hailakandi were made two other separate districts for administrative convenience.\(^7\) Statistically, the Barak Valley covers an area of 6,962 sq. km.

The Manipuris settled in Barak Valley from ancient time. And Barak Valley became one of the Manipuri inhabited areas in Assam. An early historical evidence of Manipur recorded that the first settlement of the Manipuris in the Valley took place during the reign of King Kaokhomba (411-428 A.D.), a king of Manipur, when one Chennjel Naral Panganba migrated to the Barak Valley in the 5\(^{th}\) century A.D.\(^8\) Then, centuries after, a limited number of Manipuri families also settled in Khashpur. They were the relatives of the princess Induprava, who was married to King Krishna Chandra, a Kachari King of 1806 A.D. “In fact, the influx of the Manipuris took place as a group during the Burmese occupation of Manipur (1819-26 A.D.).”\(^9\)

\(^{1}\) Dr. Arunima Bhattacharjee, *Students Movement in Barak Valley*, Sahitya Prakashini, Hailakandi, 2011, p.12
\(^{2}\) Mutum Jhulon, *Bijoy Panchali*, Imphal, 1947, p. 58
Thus, the migration and settlement of the Manipuris in Barak Valley has been discussed on three stages as under.

The First stage has covered up to 1709 A.D. i.e. Pre-Hindu period before the reign of Garibnawaj in Manipur. The Second stage, which started from the Hinduization or Sanskritization period i.e. from the reign of King Garib Niwas to the throne of Manipur and up to the major depredation of Burmese invasion (1819-25 A.D.) in Manipur which is known as the ‘Chahi Taret Khuntakpa’ or ‘Seven Years Devastation’ in the history of Manipur. The Third stage has covered up the period just after the major depredation of Burmese invasion in Manipur from 1826 to 1891 A.D.

Presently there are total 174 Manipuri inhabited villages in Barak valley. Out of these total 129 Manipuri inhabited villages are in Cachar, 29 in Hailakandi and 16 in Karimganj districts respectively. (Name of the Manipuri Villages in Barak Valley can be seen in Appendix-I.A). Among these villages some villages are newly established. Besides, some other Manipuri inhabited villages in the Valley had also become extinct. The some of those extinct and gradually declining Manipuri inhabited villages are Hingor, Hathirmora, Bojal Ghat, Bhuanagar, Ramanagar and Chinjur etc. in the Cachar district of Barak Valley. Most of the Manipuris inhabited villages in Barak Valley were situated near by the lakes, river and hill etc.

BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY:

In the Manipuri royal chronicle, Assam or Upper Assam or Brahmaputra Valley is referred to as ‘Takhao’. The name is derived from the Dikhao River, a tributary of the Brahmaputra River, following in Sibsagar district. It is on the bank of the river Dikhao that Ahom Kingdom of Assam had its capital at that time, from that time onwards the Manipuris had best relation with Assam. The historical relation between Assam (Brahmaputra Valley) and Manipur began in the early part of the 15th century A.D., when the Assamese Govinda Manik and six families entered to Manipur from Assam during the reign of King Ningthou Khomba (1432-67 A.D.). In the year 1762 A.D. the King Jai Singh (1763-89 A.D.) offered his brother’s daughter princess Kuranganayani to Ahom King Swargadev Rajeshwar Singh (1758-64 A.D.). “In the honour of Magalau (Assamese called Manipuri as ‘Magalau’), Kumari Kuranganayani, a pond was named ‘Magalau Jiykar Pukhuri’ (the tank of Magalau daughter), a place which is

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10 Naorem Sanajaoba, *op.cit*, p. 275
about 6 kilometers (3 miles) down away from Gauri Sagar in Sibsagar district nearby Jorhat town. The place where the followers of Manipuri men and women accompanying with princess Kuranganayani had been settled came to be known as Magalau Ghat.” Thus in this year, the first settlement of the Manipuris in the Valley was occurred.

Again in the year 1770 and 1780, some of the Manipuris came to Assam. The Revolt of 1857 also affected Manipur state also. The Manipuri King Chandrakriti helped the British by offering services of Manipuri soldiers and some of them remained in Assam. Majority of the Manipuris for the first time began to settle at Sadia. And from that place the Manipuris came to Dibrugarh, Shillong and other places. Presently, there are total about 96 Manipuri inhabited villages in Brahmaputra Valley of Assam (Name of the Manipuri Villages in Brahmaputra Valley can be seen in Appendix-I.B).

THE MANIPURI SPEAKERS IN ASSAM:

Presently, Assam has 27 districts. Out of these total, 23 districts are inhabited by Manipuri speakers in the state. The total number of Manipuri speaking population in the different districts of Assam according to Census of India, 1991 is 1,26,987 and 2001 is 1,54,059 respectively. The highest population of Manipuris inhabited in the state is Cachar District according to the Census of India, 1991. There are total number 84,073 populations in the district. The lowest population inhabited in the state is Dhubri district. There are only total number of 37 populations are in the district. The detail information for district wise population is not available in Census of India, 2001. The following table-2.3 will show the details information of Manipuri speakers in Assam according to Census of India 1991 and 2001.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Manipuri Speakers in 1991</th>
<th>Manipuri Speakers in 2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Barpeta</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bongaigaon</td>
<td>112</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>84,073</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>121</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dhemaji</td>
<td>301</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Dhubri</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dibrugarh</td>
<td>775</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the district Profile the classification of the different languages are not analyzed. So, the data of Manipuri language speakers are also not available.

11 Ibid, p. 285
THE MANIPURIS IN TRIPURA:

The process of the Manipuris migratory movement passed through Jirighat in Manipur. The Manipuris inhabitation moved upward the river tributaries of Surma like Dolai, Manu and Kuwai etc. up to Agartala and beyond Agartala. They started settlement by cutting jungles and reclaiming jungle lands. In the midst of Srihatta (Sylhet) and Tripura via Agartala and Comilla. The Meeteis in Dharmanagar, Koilasahar, Kanchanbari, Komolpuri and Khwai are migrants from the erstwhile East Bengal. ‘Takhenleibak’ was the name given by the Meeteis of Manipur to the Principality of Tripura. The relation between the ‘Meitrabak’ (Manipur) and ‘Takhenleibak’ (Tripura) was evolved during the last three centuries.12

THE MANIPURI SPEAKERS IN TRIPURA:

Tripura is inhabited by different tribes and people like Bengali Hindus, Muslims, Manipuris and others etc. According to Census of India, 1991, the Manipuri speakers of the state are 17,794 and 2001 census the total Manipuri speakers in the state are 20,716. Presently there are

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12 Naorem Sanjaoba, _op.cit_, p 23
a total about 95 Manipuri inhabited villages in the three districts namely West District, North District and Dholai District in Tripura State.\footnote{Khuman Poram Thiba (Haorombam Kundalal), \textit{Cha Cup Ani, Manglangi Phura Ani}, the author, Silchar, 2012, pp.15-16}

\textbf{THE MANIPURI (MEETEI) PEOPLE:}

The Manipuris call themselves by the name Meetei. Etymologically, the term had been derived from the words ‘Mee’ + ‘Atei’, ‘Mee’ means ‘man’ and ‘Atei’ means ‘other’.\footnote{N. Phulo, \textit{Meetei Houbham Wari }, The Ahan Tara-nithoi of Apokpa Marup, Hailakandi, 2009 p.1} According to the myths and legends of the ‘Meeteis’; Tengbanba Mapu, the supreme god ordered Atinga Guru Sidaba (Creator), first man of the universe to create the world. Accordingly he created other man than himself looking his shadow falls in the eyes of his pupil. Another version is that Meetei God Lairen Pakhangba is symbolized in the form of a snake posture, joins his tail with his mouth. ‘Mei’ means tail, ‘Tai’ means join, hence, the name ‘Meitei’.\footnote{Lukram Rajmohan Singh, “The Meeteis Identity”, \textit{The Gauhati Manipuri Social Organization}, Silver Jubilee Souvenir, Kambam Roman Bihari, Guwahati, 2005, p. 31} However, it is argued among the scholars that Meeteis had no snake-god tradition. Other version is that the word ‘Meitei’ comes from the word ‘Mei’, which means Fire God. It is also opined by the scholars that this theory is not acceptable as the Meeteis had no legend story of Fire God.\footnote{Ibid.} Therefore, the view that relates the meaning of the word Meetei to Other Man or Other People can be taken as the most appropriate. This view can be further be strengthened when T.C Hodson says that “the group name ‘Meithei’ has been derived from mi= man and thei= separate.”\footnote{T. C. Hodson , \textit{The Meitheis}, Low Price Publication, New Delhi, reprint 2007, p.10} The Meetei community is a heterogeneous community consisting of the Meeteis ‘with its seven exogamous clans i.e. Mangang (Ningthauja), Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Moirang, Khabanganba, and Sarang-Leishangthem’, Manipuri Bramhins (Meetei Bramhon), Manipuri-Muslims (Meetei Pangals) and Lois (slaves or dependent group of Manipuris i.e. Manipuri SC) etc. The Meeteis have the elements- Mongoloids, Australoids, Austro-Asiatics, and stains of Caucasoids, of which the Mongoloid element is the predominating factor. Broadly speaking, the features of the Manipuris are Mongoloids. Manipuri people belong to the \textit{Kuki-Chin} group of the Tibeto-Burman family of the Mongolian race. But a good admixture of Aryans and other blood groups also took place in the mainstream of Manipuri nation. Because of its special geographical
location and as a result of several religious and political interactions, Manipur became the melting point of different ethnic groups and cultures.

**THE ORIGIN OF THE MANIPURI (MEETEI) PEOPLE:**

The origin of the Manipuri people is still quite obscure. Several contradicting views were advanced in tracing their origin. The ruling classes of Manipur, since the days of King Pamheiba alias Garib-Niwas have claimed for themselves as a Hindu or Western descendant and this claim is supported by state’s first group of educated elites and this view can be seen in their writings. “To them, the Manipuris are the descendants of Aryans and they quote the Mahabharata in confirmation of their claim. Most of the ancient Meetei religious Scripts (Puyas) were burnt at the instance of the King Pamheiba, when Hinduization process started in the 18th century. Many of the remaining Puyas were twisted and other rewritten or amended to give a Hindu outlook.”

But this claim of a Hindu origin was rejected by R. B Pemberton who says of the Manipuris that “Manipuris were the descendants of Tatar Colony, which probably migrated from the North-west borders of China during the sanguinary conflicts for supremacy...” R. Brown also asserted that “although the general facial characteristic of the Manipur are of the Mongolian type, there is a great diversity of features amongst them, none of them showing regularly approaching the Aryan type.” But Mc Culloch has given a different view that “the Manipuris were descendant from the surrounding tribes than from a Tartar Colony from China. In support of his arguments he had pointed out the similarities between the hill people of the surrounding hill areas and the people of the valley area. Here he specifically mentioned the similarities between Naga and Meiteis in language and dresses of the Naga fashion worn by Kings and Queens during the time of coronation.”

But unfortunately he was not able to make an explicit theoretical idea about the origin of the people. Mc Culloch’s opinion was shared by R. Brown who speculates “should it be a correct view that the valley Manipur was at no very distant period almost covered entirely by water, the origin of the Manipuris from the surrounding hill tribes is the proper and only conclusion to be arrived at. I think it probable that when only a small part of the valley skirting the hill was capable of cultivation, the hill men bordering it used to descend and cultivate the little land there then was, returning to their homes in the hills after their harvest; as however,

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18 Rajendra Kshetri, *op.cit*, p.32
19 R. B. Pemberton, *The Eastern Frontier of India*, Mittal, New Delhi, reprint 1979, p.44
21 N. Joy Kumar Singh, *Social Movements in Manipur*, Mittal, New Delhi, 2005, p.19
land increased, some few of them settled permanently in the plain, gradually increasing in numbers. 

Brain Houghton Hougdon also made an attempt to bring out the origin of the Manipuri people of Manipur from linguistic point of view. He said that “in the ‘Moitay’ of Manipur we have the combined appellation of the Siames Tai and Kochin Chinese ‘Moy’. In other words, the Manipurian tribe, called Cossiahs by the Bengalis, belongs to the ‘Moi’ section of the great tribe called ‘Tai’ by themselves and Shanvel Syan by the Burmese, the sectional name being also foreign and equivalent to the native.”

“Of course, the Manipuris are totally distinct from the Khasis. But it is difficult to group the Meitheis with the Tai races especially on linguistic grounds when the structure and the vocabulary of the Meithei language are so similar to those of the Tibeto-Burman languages.” Hodson hence came to the conclusion that “two hundred years ago in internal organization, in religion, in habits and manners, the Meitheis were the hill people. The successive waves of foreign invasion Shan, Burmese, English and Hindu have each left permanent marks on the civilization, but their ultimate homogeneity with the Nagas and Kukis of the hill is undoubted”. Since the advent of Hinduism, almost all the written records of the history of Manipur are ruined by the influence of Hinduism. It is with this view in mind that T. C. Hodson, R. Brown, R. B Pemberton and other writers have questioned the authenticity of the Hinduised history written after and during the 18th century. S. K Chatterji rejected the Aryan connection in his *Kirata- Jana-Krti* saying that “the Meitheis or Manipuris are the most advanced section of the Kuki-Chin people.” In the absence of historical evidences it is doubtful if the real nature of the connections and affinities between the Meeteis and the hill tribes can be traced. However, the Meeteis’ Aryan connection has turned out to be a myth which has now finally been exploded. It is also fairly well-established that the name ‘Manipur’ is very recent origin and was never in existence in the history of Kangleipak before the reign of King Pamheiba. It was given only after Hinduism became the state religion during Pamheiba’s reign.

However, no precise conclusion could be made so far. But there is an accepted view that linguistically Manipuris are the most advanced section of the Kuki-Chin people and their

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22 quoted in Rajendra Kshetri, *op. cit*, p.32
23 Ibid., p.33
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., p.11
27 Rajendra Kshetri, *op. cit*, p.33
language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group and so they are of the same family with this group.

**MANIPURI LANGUAGE:**

Manipuri language (also called *Meeteilon* and Meithei in Linguistic literature) is a direct descendent of the accumulation of Kuki Chin group of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. *Meeteilon*, which etymologically means ‘language of the Meeteis’. Manipuri language is evolved out of traditional Meetei language, the speech of the politically dominant group in Manipur. Legends, songs and manuscripts found in this language evidently prove a long and continued existence of it. It appears that though Manipuri language was lingua franca of the different groups, each spoke a separate dialect, and as a result of the proximity with one another or of the subsequent amalgamation, many words from those dialects have been taken over and introduced into the main language.

There are different views regarding to the origin of Manipuri language. According to some English Scholars like Mr. Domant opined that it was brought from Bengal by 1700 A.D., while Mr. T. C. Hodson traced its introduction by Chinese migrants. According to him “the Meithei word *che* paper is of foreign and not of Indian origin.”28 According to R. K Jhalajit Singh “the Manipuri script is a descendent of some form of Brahmi script.”29 According to Ch. Manihar Singh “that the Meitei script evolved out of Bramhi is quite evident and there are four sub-branches of Brahmi, two of which spread to North-East and North India. The Bengali script is one of those which spread to North-East by 1390 A. D. Other scripts are Oriya, Maithili, Assamese, Keithi Gujarat and Bihari in this group.”30 The early Manipuri language is spoken by the people of those days recorded in the old manuscript or archaic Meetei bears testimony of different vocabularies having the same meanings.31 Some examples are given below.

The Specimen of Archaic Manipuri words used in Masses is given below in chart-2.1 with their Modern Manipuri and English translations.

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30 Ch. Manihar Singh, *op cit.*, p.9
**MANIPURI SCRIPT:**

The status of a language can be ascertained by its scripts. There is no denying fact that the Manipuris were conversant with the art of writing having their own scripts. There are different views held by different scholars regarding the origin of the Manipuri scripts. In the opinion of Mr. Damant “the old Manipuri alphabet was introduced from Bengal in the reign of Charairongba, who flourished about 1700 A.D. There are no traces of the existence of writing in Manipur before that time.” On the basis of certain local traditions Mr. T.C. Hodson framed a Hypothesis that “the Manipuris acquired the art of writing from the Chinese, who came to Manipur about 1540 A.D.” The above contentions of Mr. Damant and Mr. T.C. Hodson may be analyzed with reference to numismatic evidences available today. The coins of Wura Konthouba (568-658 A.D), Lairenba (1394-99A.D) containing archaic Manipuri script given valuable information about the introduction of Manipuri alphabet before the 6th century A.D. Epigraphically records and old Manuscripts available today suggested that Manipur is the cradle.

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of literate civilization. This was evidenced by the stone inscription written in Meetei script, which was discovered in different parts of Manipur like Khoibu, Konthoujam Lairemma, Ngaprum Chingjin, Nigel, Leisangkhong and 1st Bn Manipur Rifles etc.

Like other prominent languages of India, Manipuri language has a scientific system of scripts. The use of the script was introduced in the state from early times and the fact had also been exposed from the findings of coins, stone and metal inscriptions along with the writings on handmade paper. "In 11th and 12th century A.D many books were written on *agarbak* (bark of Agar tree) during the reign of King Khagemba (1547-1652 A.D.)."34 During his reign, the Meeteis had learnt making paper and begun writing on them. According to *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, the royal chronicle of Manipur, many manuscripts were written during his reign in 1616 for learning. The Meetei script had been inscribed on coins as early as 6th and 7th centuries. The script was written on *agarbak* and indigenous papers by 11th and 16th centuries respectively. Inscriptions on stone, iron plate, brass and copper belonging to 16th and 17th centuries are found. Traces of Bengali/Assamese scripts have found their way in the manuscripts of the 18th and 19th centuries.35

From about quarter part of 18th century A.D Sanskrit and Bengali scripts began to replace Manipuri scripts slowly owing to the influence of Vaishnavism followed by King Garib Niwas and later in the second half of the 19th century A.D her relations with Britishers and also due to absence of foundry and printing press in Meetei scripts. By about the early part of the 20th century A.D Bengali script totally replaced the Meetei script. All common people began to learn the Bengali scripts while Meetei scripts were studied by the royal pundits and those who were interested in that field. A powerful movement for revival of traditional Meetei religion, language and culture started during the 1930s by Hijam Irabot Singh in Manipur and beyond Manipur and by Naoria Phulo in the Manipuri inhabited areas of Barak valley of Assam and it gradually reached Manipur in the 1940s. Thus as a result of the Revivalist Movement, Manipuris began to use their traditional old Manipuri script and the process is still continuing. The Government of Manipur has also taken keen interest for the upliftment of Manipuri script by introducing and recognizing the 27 *Meetei Mayek* (Manipuri scripts) on 16th April 1980 according to Govt. order no 1/2/78-SS/E.36 The Governor, Manipur is pleased to approve the report submitted by the

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Meetei Mayek Expert Committee constituted vide Government order of even number dated 16th November, 1978 on the re-introduction of the study of Meitei Scripts numbering 27 (Twenty seven) alphabets and its supplement (use of Lonsum, Cheitap-Cheikhei, Khudam & Cheising etc.) as per annexure as recommended by the Committee in the educational institutions in Manipur. **36**

The recognized Twenty Seven (27) Manipuri Scripts (Meetei Mayek) uses by the Government of Manipur are as follows in the chart-2.2.

**Chart-2.2**

**The recognized Twenty Seven (27) Scripts of Manipuri Language**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meetei Mayek</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ᡳ</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ᡲ</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ᡲ踅</td>
<td>Kok</td>
<td>Kok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ᡵthumbnails</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Sam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ᡷthumbnails</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ᡸthumbnails</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>᡹thumbnails</td>
<td>Lai</td>
<td>Lai</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Eyek Epi (ইয়েক ইপি)**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Symbol</th>
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<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ᡳthumbnails</td>
<td>Ng</td>
<td>Ng</td>
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<tr>
<td>ᡲthumbnails</td>
<td>Th</td>
<td>Th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ᡲ踅thumbnails</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>W</td>
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<tr>
<td>ᡵthumbnails</td>
<td>Thou</td>
<td>Thou</td>
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<tr>
<td>ᡷthumbnails</td>
<td>Wai</td>
<td>Wai</td>
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<td>ᡸthumbnails</td>
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<td>Un</td>
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<td>᡹thumbnails</td>
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<td>Jh</td>
<td>Jh</td>
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<td>᡻thumbnails</td>
<td>Rai</td>
<td>Rai</td>
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<tr>
<td>᡼thumbnails</td>
<td>Dil</td>
<td>Dil</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Lonsum Eyek (লোনসুম ইয়েক)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meetei Mayek</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ᡳthumbnails</td>
<td>Gh</td>
<td>Gh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ᡲthumbnails</td>
<td>Dh</td>
<td>Dh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ᡲ踅thumbnails</td>
<td>Bh</td>
<td>Bh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**36 Manipur Gazette, No.33, Imphal, April 22, 1980**
The character symbols of the Manipuri script are mainly represented by combination in various forms of pieces of straight lines with relatively less presence of curves unlike Assamese, Bengali and Devnagiri scripts. Its immediate origin may be attributed to the Brahmi script. The same character symbols E= ए (Pha), ऐ = ऐ (Ba) and ऋ = ऋ (La) of the Brahmi script are found in Manipuri script with addition of upper limbs or bars in the latter two cases like भ and ऋ respectively. It is now clearly seen that Manipuri script is a combination of modified Brahmi scripts with indigenous component.

Different schools have given different views regarding the fixation of the numbers of the alphabets of Manipuri language. There are four groups of school, i.e. the school of 35 alphabets, 27 alphabets, 18 alphabets and 36 alphabets.

According to the school of 35 alphabets claimed that the Manipuri script is one oldest alphabet so far available in the human civilization. Each of the 35 alphabets is also accompanied with different parts of human body. The alphabet of 35 scripts was used during the reign of Maharaja Chandrakriti Singh (1850-1886 A.D.) of Manipur. This was evidence in the correspondence between the Maharaja and British and it was published in the journal of “Asiatic Society of Bengal” in 1877. G. A. Grierson in his Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. III, Pt. III also mentioned that his information about 35 alphabets was on the basis of Sarang Pandit.

According to the school of 27 alphabets claimed that the 27 written alphabets is the only indigenous archaic script. According to their views, the formation of the 27 scripts is developed from the parts of the human body. However, in the case of 9 alphabets viz., Gok, Jham, Raai, Jil, Dil, Ghou and Bham these alphabets does not mentioned anything about the parts of human body from which the scripts is developed.

According to the school of 18 alphabets strongly claimed that the 18 letter script is the only original Manipuri script. They are of the opinion that the origin of the development of the script is directly related with the parts of the human body.

According to the school of 36 alphabets claimed that the script was being an earliest script which used by Manipuri ancestors in ancient time. As per the observation of the script

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38 Ibid, p. 507
39 Moirangthem Imocha Singh, *op.cit*, p.49
*S* Sarang Pandit – A renowned Manipuri Scholar, who transliterated the ancient archaic Manipuri character and also supported his view in favour of the existence of 35 scripts in the old Manipuri scriptures.
available in the form of coin, the chief epigraphy of India given his opinion that "the script is as old as Proto-Bengali."

With the wave of revivalist movement emotionally charged with Meetei sentiments, most revivalists moved for the replacement of the Bengali scripts by the Meetei scripts. There are arguments for and-against the different scripts claimed to be the Meetei scripts by the different revivalist among themselves. The chaos lasted for more than two decades. Finally, the Government of Manipur set up a commission to examine an officially recognizable Meetei script in the year 1973 A.D. known as ‘Meetei Mayek Expert Committee’. The commission included different representatives and scholars. At last after much deliberation the commission came to a unanimous decision on 16th April 1980 according to Govt. order no. 1/2/78-SSE and declared that the 27 alphabets and its supplement (uses of Lonsum, Cheitap-Cheikhei, Khudam and Cheising etc.) is the official Meetei script. The present officially approved script accommodates more sounds. It has 24 consonant letters, 3 independent vowel alphabets, 7 Cheitap (attachment) vowel alphabets and 1 consonant attachment alphabets, but lacks in tonal vowel alphabets.

LINGUISTIC FAMILY OF MANIPURI LANGUAGE:

Different writers and scholars have given different views regarding the linguistic family of Manipuri language. Mr. Houghton Hodson and other scholars have opined that Manipuri language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages. G. A. Grierson says that its affinity with other Tibeto-Burman languages is more keenly observed in relation with Kachin. Meitei ama, one corresponds to Kachin ai-ma and ngai-ma; Meitei ai, I to Kachin ngai; the Meitei male suffix laba in yel laba, cock to Kachin la in u-la, cock; Meitei hui dog, to Kachin gui; Meitei si to Kachin si, to die and so many others. Its agreement with Burmese is in regard to the second personal pronoun and adjectival prefix, while it agrees with Tibetan rather than with Burmese as in the case of the suffix pa which exercises almost all the functions of the corresponding Tibetan suffix. Parting it down further, he prefers to call the group to which Manipuri language belongs as Kuki-chin or Meitei-chin from the point of their closer affinities. He concisely remarks: "If there is one principle that is universally accepted as comparative philology, it is that languages must be classed according to their grammar." In the light of this, we may also take the help of Paul K. Bendict, who has done extensive researches on Sino-Tibetan language. According to

him, “Meitei, the State language of Manipur, shows significant points of contact with Kachin as well as with Kuki-Naga, though the affinities are prominently with the later.”

While this is the generally accepted feature of Manipuri language, there is another aspect which had not been seriously looked into, either for lack of proper knowledge or want of adequate facilities. The study and observations on Manipuri language by Western linguists and scholars have been done in relation with comparatively Modern Manipuri language only. Compositions in old Manipuri language done as late as latter half of the 19th century, not to speak those of the earlier period, consist of a wide range of words so variant with those of the Modern. What G. A. Grierson, and Houghton Hodson listed as Manipuri words against those of other Tibeto-Burman languages to prove their affinity with other Tibeto-Burman languages are from modern vocabulary only. In this family, Manipuri language was perhaps the only language which grew under a highly cultured royal patronage and also which had a long written literature. Therefore, Suniti Kumar Chatterji said, “Among the various Tibeto-Burman languages, the most important and in literature certainly of much greater importance than Newari is the Meitei or Manipuri language.”

Manipuri language belongs to the Kuki-Chin group of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The formation of the Tibeto-Burman tribes dialects were composed of the dialects of the tribes of Tibetan and Himalayan origin; Asiatic origin like Karen, Kachin, King, Kang, Kou Man, Mon etc.; Chinese like chin, Ch’u etc; and Tai origin like Shen Lao, Ngai Lao, Lai etc. besides other elements of Huns and Taratas which came comparatively later. When these tribes got mixed a series of dialects known as Tibeto-Burman of the so called Sino-Tibetan family of language gave birth. The Tibeto-Burman language began to develop from about early Christian era and became fully characterized from about the 7th century A.D.

Now let us discuss about the status of Manipuri language in Pre-Vaishnavite period, Vaishnavite period and British period with the following Section-I, II and III.

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41 Ch. Manihar Singh, op. cit, p.7
42 Ibid, p.8
43 Suniti Kumar Chatterji, op. cit, p.157
44 W. I Singh, op. cit., p. 443
MANIPURI LANGUAGE IN THE PRE-VAISHNAVITE AND EARLY VAISHNAVITE PERIOD (1467-1709 A.D.)

The date of birth of Meeteilon or Manipuri is estimated to be about 800-850 A.D. prior to this date it was the dialect of some ancient tribes. It appears from Manipuri accounts that the mixed dialects of Chakkha (Saka), Khu, Lei, Nga and Nung is the basic foundation of Meeteilon or Manipuri language as evident from the literary accounts that they frequently mention the dialects of other tribes as if deviated forms from that of the speech of this group, which they took as the foundation.\cite{Ibid., p.444} In similar way for different tribes likes Marem, Moirang, Nongyai, Khamba, Heirem-khunjal, Senbi-Kabow, Shelloy-Langmai etc. the dialects are found to have been mentioned occasionally.\cite{Loc.cit.} By about 950 A.D some words belonging to Shelloy-Langmai and Chenglei began to mix. It further expanded its mixing with dialects of Leihou, Mahou, who spoke a neo-Tibetan mixed with Bodo elements or sub-Himalayan dialects; Kharoi, Ngangoi, Hangoi etc. who spoke Tibeto-Burman of neo-Burmese origin; Heirem etc., who spoke a Tai dialects. Along with the incoming of more dialects, Manipuri language continued to grow up to about 1200 A.D. In short the period from 800 A.D to 1200 A.D. is the first phase of Meeteilon.\cite{Ibid., p. 445}

Since then new stocks of Tibeto-Burman dialects spoken by the tribes like Mangang, Mayang-Thongnang etc. came in. Not much later than the Mangangs, an altogether different stock of language of the Indo-Aryan family also came in, more precisely at about 1225 A.D. along with the Tibeto-Burman Mayang. Those Indo-Aryans dialects were the dialects of Bangals and proto-Bangals. The presence of the new stock of the language i.e. the Indo-Aryans language on the first phase Meeteilon lasted up to about 1260 A.D. From about 1300 A.D., the language i.e. Meeteilon received another impact of other Tibeto-Burman dialects of Moirang along with the dialects along with the dialects of Kege. Thus at about 1400 A.D Meeteilon had assumed a new dimension. From 1200 A.D. to 1400 A.D. may be taken as the second phase of Meeteilon.\cite{Ibid., p. 445}

The new language continued to grow with the absorption of some of the words or the dialect of Senbi-Kabow up to about 1600 A.D with an independent development. The dialects of Senbi-Kabow belonged to a mixed dialect of Tai and Asiatic tribes. The period from 1400 A.D.

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\cite{Ibid., p.444.}  
\cite{Loc.cit.}  
\cite{Ibid., p. 445}  
\cite{Loc.cit.}
to 1600 A.D. may be regarded as the third phase of Meeteilon. From 1600 A.D. the modern period emerged. However, the language of the 17th century A.D as seen to-day contains much obsolete words. The written accounts so far available to us were all the 17th Century A.D. writing and hence the language in them was the language of that period with few words of the early period. It is very likely that the early dialects of the Manipuris were gradually changed by the presence of the other Tibeto-Burmans. It may be noted that the dialects of the Tai or its associate tribe Chakpa, who arrived on this land as early as the 12th century A.D. had practically no impact on Meeteilon. The Indo-Aryan dialects which came a few years later than 1600 A.D had practically a little impact on the language. The Austric person who has been settled in the Western Imphal Valley from 14th century A.D. had very little impact on the Manipuri Language.49

Before adopting the Vaishnavism the Manipuris has their own early religion, which revolved around the worship of their ancestors. The Meetei concept of ‘Atiya Guru Sidaba’, who is regarded as the supreme deity and he is associated with sky, who creates and withdraws himself of a typical supreme God. Meeteis worshipped a number of Gods and Goddesses under their ancient system of religion. Of them the important ones include Lainingthou Sanamahi, Leimalel Sidabi, Phunga, Imoinu Ahong Achaudi, Salailel and Thongalel etc.50\textit{Lainingthou} (Supreme God) Sanamahi is the most honored deity. He is the creator and controller of the Universe. ‘Sanamahism’ or Sanamahi religion is based on God Sanamahi is socially and legally recognized from of religion. The most important principle of Sanamahism was truth of knowledge and realization. God Sanamahi was worshipped at three levels. 1. As the state Deity, 2. As Sagei (Sub-Clan) Deity and 3. As Household Deity.51

MANIPURI LANGUAGE IN THE EARLY VAISHNAVISM PERIOD (1467-1709 A.D.):

After a long process of traditional religious practices, Manipur came into contact with Hinduism in the form of worship of God Vishnu. Vaishnavism is the Sanskrit word, which is one of the major branches of Hinduism along with Shaivism, Smartism, and Shaktism. It is focused on the worship of Supreme Lord Vishnu. Vaishnavites or the followers of the Supreme Lord

49 \textit{Ibid.}, p. 446.
PhD Thesis

Manipuri Language Movement, 1924-1992

Vishnu, lead a way of life promoting differentiated monotheism (henotheism), which gives importance to Lord Vishnu and his ten incarnations. The oldest religious Vedic text the Rig-Veda, describes Lord Vishnu as the Supreme Deity. Vishnavism is an all India phenomenon, but it has taken different forms and shades in different regions of the country. The development of Vaishnavic literature in a particular region or State has been influenced by the particular form or shade of Vaishnavism in the pre-dominant area. Since the fifteenth century, Vishnu worship was patronized by the King Kiyamba (1467-1508 A.D.) of Manipur. King Kiyamba got an image of God Vishnu from the King of Pong (Burmese King) at time of concluding a friendly treaty in 1470 A.D. The image of Lord Vishnu was installed in a masonry temple at the old Manipur capital of Lamangdong, approximately 36 km (18 miles) to the south of Imphal. The royal patronage of worshiping lord Vishnu was given with Hari Sankirton. Since then Lamangdong was consequently came to be known as Bishnupur. There was a regular flow of Bramhin immigrants to Manipur. The Brahmin scholars had started to exert Sanskrit influence on the Manipur’s court life especially in the field of astrology. The Brähmin scholars were employed by the monarchs for multifarious work in administrative and religious affairs especially in the performance of rite and rituals. The visiting of Brahmans used to get acquaintance with the king or the queen or the members of the royal family. The cult of lord Vishnu made a strong appeal to the king of Manipur from the reign of King Kiyamba. The reigning of king Khangemba (1597-1652 A.D.) also contributed to the progress of Vaishnavism as the image of lord Vishnu became the emblem of the king of Manipur; the king was treated as the incarnation of Vishnu of his time. Worshiping of great god and goddess exerted a great influence on the mind of the people. The cult of animal sacrifice, evil spirits, human sacrifice and snakes were widely prevalent at this time.

Again by the close of the seventeenth century, Manipuri language came into contact with other Indo-Aryan languages and when many of the vocals of the letter have been adopted; their use too has been mostly in the pattern of simultaneously placing of two synonyms as in the old practice that is a Sanskrit and Bengali word followed by its Manipuri equivalent. And those newly borrowed are more or less confined to words of abstract significance only.

Before coming of the Vaishnavism in Manipur, Manipuri language was used as the

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53 Ch. Manihar Singh, *op.cit*, p.6
official language and Court language of the State. The scripture of the ancient Manipuri archaic language are still found in different parts in and outside the present boundary of Manipur inscribed on stone and copper plates. These inscriptions were all written in archaic Manipuri language. To mention some of them were inscription of King Pakhangba (1st Century, A.D), Phayeng Copper plate (8th Century A.D.), Stone inscriptions of King Sameirang (6th Century A.D), Kiyamba (15th Century A.D.), Medingu Khagemba (16th Century A.D), Maharaj Charai Rongba (17th Century A.D) and Stone inscription at Ngaprum Chingjeng (17th Century A.D.), Stone Inscription at Leisangkhong in Manipur (18th Century A.D) etc. The Photo of the Stone Inscription of Maharaja Charairongba (17th Century, See in Illustration-A)

II

MANIPURI LANGUAGE IN THE VAISHNAVITE PERIOD (1709-1891 A.D.)

Manipur had already come into contact with Hinduism in the form of worship of Vishnu since the middle of the fifteenth century. Royal patronage was given to the worship of Vishnu by successive rulers but the Brahmins who migrated to Manipur did more the spread of Hinduism in this hill State. The first Meetei King who was converted into Vaishnavism was King Charai Rongba (1697-1709 A.D.) in 1704 A.D. The chronicle records that despite his conversion to and profession of Hinduism, he could not totally make a break from traditional Meetei religion and social norms. The Vaishnavism became the dominant religion of the state during the reign of King Charai Rongba and his son King Pamheiba alias Garib Niwas (1709-1748 A.D.). During the reign of Charai Rongba, some Vaishnava saints came in Manipur. The king and his family were initiated into the new faith. According to ‘Cheitharol Kumbaba’ royal chronicle, the king and some of his noble took the sacred thread after a day’s of fasting. Conversion of the king to Vishnu religion was possible only because there had already been at least some influence of Vaishnavism in court circles. The king never attempted to impose the new religion upon the people as a whole. At his initiative a Vishnu temple was constructed. A temple of Goddess Kali was also built. At the same time, the king paid respects to the old faith and temples erected in honour of the Gods of the traditional religion.

55 Dr. L. Bhagyachandra Singh, op. cit. p. 148.
Vaishnavism reached its zenith during the reign of King Pamheiba. The process of forcible Hindunization was carried out by Pamheiba, son of Charai Rongba. He was initiated into Vaishnavism by Guru Gopal Das. He punished those who violated Hindu dietary laws. The proselytizing zeal of Pamheiba displaced the traditional Gods. He destroyed several temples of Umanglais.\(^{56}\) In the later part of Pamheiba’s reign, Shanta Das, a Bramhin from Sylhet came to Manipur and began to preach Vaishnavism of the School of Ramanandi cult. “According to some Manipuri writers, the king was initiated by Shanta Das into the Ramanandi sect. After the initiation he severely persecuted not only the followers of the traditional religion but also those who belonged to the other sect of Vaishnavism. Through the instigation of Shanta Das, the King collected all the Puyas (Manipuri secret books) and ancestral records and burnt them at Kangla Utra, the Capital place of Manipur, this incident is known in the history of Manipur as ‘Puya Meithaba’. By a royal decree the books and records in Meetei scripts were banned. Maichaus (Manipuri Scholars), who were in possession of the ancient texts, went to remote areas of the hills and the valley to keep their treasure concealed.”\(^{57}\)

**PUYA MEITHABA – BURNING OF HOLY MEETEI SCRIPTURES:**

The ‘Cheitharol Kumbaba’, the royal chronicle mentioned the incident of ‘Puya Meithaba’ (burning of Ancient books of Manipuri Scriptures) in page - 93. The first reference to the burning of Ancient books were made by Khumanthem Kaomacha who was ballad singer turned historian in his ‘Manipur Ittibritti’ (1934) and the names of 123 books in manuscripts which were burnt are listed in this work.\(^{58}\) At the instigation of Shanta Das Gosain, more than 123 Meetei Puyas had been consigned at Kangla Utra to flames at around 9–10 a.m. Sunday the 17\(^{th}\) day of Mera (21\(^{st}\) October) in 1729. It was definitely an unethical action on the part of king and his preceptor. When there was no fruitful result to the strong objection of this disastrous conduct of the king, the great Maichou (Scholar) of Meetei religion, Laurembam Khongnangthaba concealed himself. The names of the Puyas which were burnt at Kangla Utra are as follows: Taoroinai Yangbi; Pakhangba Yangbi, Pakhangba Naoyaom, Sanamahi Naoyom, Sanamahi Laihui, Taoroinai Picha, Pakhangba Thiren, Pakhangba Laihui, Sanahami Laikhan Nongkha, Leithak Leikharol, Leichinlon Laikhan Nongkha, Leikha Nonglon Kruthog,

\(^{56}\) *Ibid*, p.149
\(^{57}\) *Ibid*, p.150
Out of the 123 burnt puyas only six of them prove to be saved. They were (1) Nunglon, (2) Pakhangba Naoyon, (3) Taoroilai Naoyom, (4) Singkhal Naoyom, (5) Yangbi Thiren, (6) Shakok Thiren. At the instance of Shanta Das, the king was against the use of Meetei script, songs and prayers. He introduced Bengali script and substituted Meetei songs by Bengali songs. Manipur has thus been deprived of many, valuable religious and historical books through King Garib Niwas’s religious fanaticism. This incident of burnt down of Puyas is also called ‘Ahanba Puya Meithaba’ (the first burning of Puyas), because same kind of incident was again happened during time when British rule in Manipur. (See in Illustration-B)
Since then, it had started the Sanskritised interpolation with the post-proselytized writing for the last couple of centuries in the more than two millennia old histories of Manipur. The period from 1709-1819 A.D was the time when great ideas began to enter Manipur from others parts of India. King Garib Niwas ascended the throne of Manipur in such a period when the Shan influence was completely disappearing. It was a period when the wave of Bhakti cult was tremendously increasing in Manipur. During his reign, Manipuri literature had completely merged into the main stream of Indian literature. As a result Manipuri language began to flourish to meet the growing needs for time. The granting of Sanskrit words and words of Sanskrit origin in Manipuri language began to appear. In music, the Manipuris used Benagali, Brajaboli (an artificial language) and some extent Maithili also in addition to Manipuri. Sanskrit words like Murkha (foolish), Mukti (salvation), Anand (bliss), Yagna (sacrifice), Karna (ear), Pran (soul), Raksha (demon), Tej (light), Sena (army) and Swargarohan (ascent to heaven), etc. appeared in the literary works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As there was the influence of Sanskrit and Bengali language in the literary works of the eighteenth century Manipur, the then scholars who were all well versed in these Indo-Aryan languages used to translate a number of literary works associated with Hindu Brahminical literatures like Vedic rituals, stories and epics.

Angom Gopi, Madhavram Wahengba, Gopiram Wangkhei Pandit, Laishram Aroi, Yumnam Atibar, Mayengbam Vrindaban, Nunggangbam Govindaram, Labaga Konthoujamba, Nabananda Yubaraj and Shridam Keishamchha were important writers of the eighteenth century. Angom Gopi was the renowned poet and scholar in the royal court during the reign of Meidingu Pamheiba, and he was not only proficient in Meeteilon but also in Sanskrit and Bengali language. Angom Gopi in Garib Niwaz’s court composed his 7-volume Manipuri Ramayana based on the Ramayana of Krittibas and transcribed an episode entitled Parikshit based on the Mahabharata of Gangadas Sen. Another work dealing with the episode of Virat Parba of the Mahabharata which is ascribed to Prince Nabananda also appeared on the scene. Labango Singh Konthoujamba a great Meitei scholar during the reign of Rajarshi Bhagyachandra composed another book, Ram Nongaba dealing with the later section of Uttara Kanda which ends with an invocation to Rama, Narada, praying to them for the prosperity of the Manipuri King.


\[61\] *Ibid.*, p.50

\[62\] Manipuri Literature, Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia accessed on 20/09/2013.
Bhagyachandra. Another Vaishnavite work by Longjam Prasuram, Longoi Sagol Thaba, which was based on *Ashwamedha Parba* of the Mahabharata dealing with Arjuna-Chitrangada episode, also appeared on the scene to accelerate the process of acculturation for the Meeteis making them feel to be the offspring of Arjuna. Another Manipuri work on the Gita and a translation of the Bengali work Jamejaya Sarpa Yajna made appearance during this period. Yumkhaiba Chandra composed *Astakala Leela* and and *Mathura Viraha*. There also remained a few manuscripts in Manipuri orthography like *Vishnu Purana*, *Lakshmi Charit*, *Bhakta Charit* etc.

Seven cantos viz. Adi, Ayodha, Aryana, Kiskindhya, Sundara, Lanka and Uttara Kandas of the Ramayana were adapted in Manipuri from the original text of Krittivas. The work was not a translation but trans-creation almost rivaling the original composition.\textsuperscript{63} Besides these translation and trans-creative works, there were also creative works which were products of inspiration given by Hindu myths. Mention may be made of Henjunaha-Lairoulembi, Phisha Thangwai Pakhangba – Shunulembi which were reminiscent of the story of Savitri of the Mahabharata.\textsuperscript{64} With the official recognition of Assamese-Bengali script, and the consequent growth of Bengali as the only medium of communication with literature with the consequent influx of Bengali words of daily speech in profuse amount while Manipuri script with the Meetei pundits practically went underground, the eighteenth and nineteenth century Manipur witnessed the scene of a great socio-cultural upheaval with its language, culture and religion got increasingly dominated by the influx of destabilizing forces from Bengal.

In the month of *Inga* (May-June), on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} day, Monday, all the followers of Ramanandi were punished: all the Brámhins were sent back to the land of the Mayangs (Manipuris call to the other states as Mayangs); all the princes, brothers of the king were deposed from their positions, most of the followers were sent to prison.\textsuperscript{65} The incident was occurred in 1736. It is evident that the persecution was not simply on religious grounds but had political overtones. Perhaps the Ramanandi conspired to overthrow the king and invited royal wrath. As a result, this sect of Vaishnavism was ceased in Manipur.

After the decline of Ramanandi school of Vaishnavism in Manipur, Gaudiya Vaishnavism or Chaitanya School of Vaishnavism appears as the state religion under the King

\textsuperscript{63} Shamurailatpam Shantibala Devi, *loc. cit.*

\textsuperscript{64} Cottage Reader, *Journal of Philosophy, Art and Culture*, “The New Faces of Manipuri Language during Renaissance and After words” 9\textsuperscript{th} September, 2013 accessed on 19/09/2013.

\textsuperscript{65} Quoted in Dr. L. Bhagyachndra Singh, pp.151-152
Chingthang Khomba alias Bhagyachandra (1763-98 A.D.). During his reign, he took up various steps for the popularization of Gaudiya Vaishnavism without neglecting the indigenous gods. The most significant contribution of Bhagyachandra was the introduction of Ras Lila. It was based on the dances of Lai Huraoba. Thus traditional ritual was transformed into a classical Indian dance. Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Manipur was smoothly carried on till the reign of king Chandrakirti (1850-1886 A.D.), where the king performed many good activities and put the religious teaching into practice of Bhaktirasa cult. After the death of King Chandrakirti, Jubaraja Surchand (1886-1890 A.D.) ascended the throne of Manipur and there were no sign of development of Vaishnavism.

But, it is interesting to note that the succeeding rulers of King Garib Niwas and Manipuri preachers (Maichaus) were heavy efforts to revive the pre-Hindu culture and almost re-write the Puyas of that short period time. For insistence, the copies of Puyas which were already burnt down had preserved by the pundits (scholars) in their private possession hiddenly and rarely even today. Nevertheless, historical speaking is that since the introduction of Sanskrit, Assamese and Bengali characters by the king were gradually impact towards popularity of the written script to the people of Manipur. 

III

MANIPURI LANGUAGE IN THE BRITISH RULE PERIOD (1891-1947 A.D)

Manipur remained an independent Kingdom until the defeat of the Manipuri King Kullachandra by the British in the Anglo-Manipur War, 1891 when it lost its sovereignty and became part of the Government of British India. From then onwards until India regained its independence from the British in 1947. Thus Government of British India ruled Manipur for about 57 years. After that British had begun to destroy the palace properties and monuments. The Kangla Sha (dragons), National Emblem of the Manipur, which was erected by King Khagemba in 1533 A.D was demolished with the use of explosion dynamite. Besides these, Kangla mound, citadels, temple, the cave and the cultural objects viz. Stone implements and inscriptions were made burial and debris. Later on, the British deliberately wanted to familiar and analyzed through local pundits (scholars) about the sacred manuscripts (puyas) of Manipur. To the effect that it extend the orders and commands which were collected all the puyas from localities. The

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66 Moirangthem Imocha Singha, op.cit., p.140.
Manipuris generally kept their *puyas* and stored it at Ras Mandal. By the order of British officer Khuraijamba Lallup and others *puyas* along with local *puyas* were carried out at Kangla. Thus on 20\textsuperscript{th} July, Monday, 1891 again as the massive gloomy of historical episode of Manipuri scripture *puyas* were burnt down at Manung Kangjeibung at Kangla by British officers.\textsuperscript{67} More than 144 numbers of *Puyas* were burnt down this time. The numbers of *Puyas* burnt down were are as follows: Singkak, Singthek Higshika, Sanggai Phammang, Salai Sakok, Phamballon, Singhtharon Pudin, Kontharon, Kumbaba, Langthaballon, Taoroilai Yangbi, Pakhangba Naoyom, Taoroilai Picha, Sanamahi Naoyom, Pakhangba Yangbi, Sanamahi Laihui, Sanamahi Lamhing, Pakhngba Laihui, Sanamahi Laikallon, Leithak Leikharon, Nonglon Laicham, Leikha Ponkharon, Nonglen Krathong, Lechinlon Yumbi, Nongdon Leichinlon, Nongdon Yumbi, Leiron Yumshetpa, Nongdon Langbum, Leimaida Houba Leichinlon, Leichinlon Naoyom Patal Langbum, Shakok Thiren, Thirel Laicham etc. This incident of burnt down of *Puyas* is called in the history of Manipur as *Anishuba Puya Meithaba* (the second burning of Ancient Scriptures).

Though, some British officers had done some repressive measures towards peoples of Manipur just after the conquest in 1891 A.D., but in the later years with their initiative for introduction of Western Education in Manipur led to the emergence of Renaissance in Manipur. The period from 1907 to 1941 A.D. has been regard as the Renaissance period in the history of Manipur and a number of changes in the fields of administration, education, politics, language and literatures etc. And also birth of Manipuri classical poets, writers and reformers like Lamabam Kamal, Hijam Anganghal, Khwairakpam Chaoba, Hojam Irabot Singh etc. in the 1890s sowed the seed of Manipuri language renaissance when the progress was accelerated by the establishment of formal education in the early part of the twentieth century following the attempts to introduce formal education starting for the first time in Manipur in 1872 at the suggestion of Major General W.F. Nuthall. The most distinctive feature of the period is a shift of emphasis from Bengali to English and the vernacular language, Manipuri with the partial application of Macauly's Minute of 1835.\textsuperscript{68} While education began to gain momentum, the other social values began to break down. Hinduism as the people adopted in spite of the Vaishnavite sense of liberation from caste and creed, high and low degenerated into the foul perpetrator of

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p.142.

\textsuperscript{68} Cottage Reader, Journal of Philosophy, Art and Culture, op. cit.
the terror of untouchability upon the masses with Maharaj Churachand Singh driving the torture machine and the people reeling under which began to hate the system.

Meanwhile Christian Missionaries who had already started their propagation activities were now doing their best in the hills by establishing schools infusing the spirit of Christianity into the tribes through their education. At the same time, the leaders of the Vaishnavite faith, having understood the socio-cultural and political nuances of the juncture, were by now geared up to launch a fresh but more powerful treatment, suppressing much of the old heritage. All this while the door to the incredibly rich literary tradition of the land preserved in thousands of manuscripts by the Meitei scholars was closed to the people. These miseries led to a renaissance which found expression in socio-economic reforms followed by freedom struggle linked with that of India, in scholarship, literature, painting and other artistic expression in Manipuri language. At the same time learned Meeteis from Assam and Myanmar started a pan-Manipuri movement that brought the awakening of the middle class Manipuris in Manipur and it gradually spread and saturated the people at all social strata. In the field of socio-economic and political reforms, under the much committed leadership of Hijam Irabot, the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha, established in 1934 with the King as its president was in 1938 with a firm political stand renamed as Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha with its denouncement by the king, which again in 1946 became the State Congress when the king declared and banned it as a terrorist organization. The second women’s war came in 1939. Swadeshi movement and non-cooperation movement were also launched in Manipur during that time.  

The freedom struggle was a common experience which Manipur and the sub-continent were having at the same time against the same oppression machine, the British. Their common purpose against a common enemy brought them unconsciously, sentimentally together and thus the people of Manipur began to struggle for freedom singing Bande Mataram with the tricolor waving in their hands. Thus Indian spirituality had gradually been integrated with the aesthetic temperament of this Indo-Mongoloid group and thus this new integration found its supreme expression in songs and dances in this valley with royal patronage. The Sanskrit scholar Pundit Atombapu Sharma was the product of this period of integration and he made a persistent effort to integrate the old tradition and culture of the Meeteis with the Vaishnavism by publishing more

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69 Ibid.
than 100 books both in Manipuri and Sanskrit and by now when the world came to recognize the rich songs and dances of the land like the Rasa Leela the people began to feel proud of being a Hindu. But there came a voice of dissent, a revivalist spirit in the 1930s in Cachar led by Naoria Phulo, who started Apokpa Marup with its accent on the indigenous Meitei religion. They called for the revival of Meitei orthography and the young minds awakened at this far cry of wake-up call turned to respond in the positive, starting a ‘protestant movement’. This was another current of the renaissance.\(^{70}\)

The literary renaissance of the early twentieth century was marked by the struggle of the English-educated and Bengali-educated Manipuris who had seen much of the rich fields of English and Bengali literature, for the revival of their language and literature in their own script with which they had almost lost their link. Captain Dun wrote ‘Manipuris possess a written character of their own. This character is very ancient; only a few can write it.’ Incredible number of classical poets and writers sprang up in the front at this juncture giving a new fresh life to Manipur literature. Some of them were Khwairakpam Chaoba, Hijam Anganghal, Lamabam Kamal, Hawaibam Nabadwipchandra, Naoria Phulo, Hijam Irabot, Arambam Dorendrajit, R.K. Shitaljit, Ashangbam Minaketan, G. C Tongbra. Inspired by Bengali poets and writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Bankimchandra, Saratchandra and English poets like William Wordsworth and Sir Walter Scott, the works of these revival poets and writers took a modern shape, a complete break from their ancestral literary forms.

This revival period of Manipuri language witnessed for the first time in the history of Manipur the appearance of journals in the vernacular language like Meitei Leima (1917), Jagaran (1920) Meitei Chanu (1922 in manuscript), Yakeiron (1930), Bhagyabati Patrika, Jyoti, Lalit Manjurika, Sahitya Ichel one after another. With these changes Manipur tottered along while the wind of still other changes was whispering in through the interstices of its green branches and leaves.

The transitional period of Manipur with the assimilation of outside cultures and traditions since 18\(^{th}\) century has been happening to extinct the Meetei Script in the long continuity of her history. For insistence by adopting the process of sanskritization and modernization specially interacted with the colonial white powers led to cause of gradual declination to the indigenous

\(^{70}\) Loc.cit.
script. Henceforth, the letter script of Meetei became unpopular and gradually Bengali script has taken the place of Meetei script.

Besides this most of the important texts written in archaic Meetei scripts were put to translate into Bengali Script. Nevertheless, these external influences more or less had failed to abolish the Meetei scripts completely. Fortunately our forefathers re-written the puyas and hiding out some archaic texts into the pots by digging interior of the earth, jungles, hills and other hiding places along with oral traditions against the order of the king and his courtiers during that times. So, it has been found that to discover the Manipuri written character in a systematic manner.\textsuperscript{71}

Though, Manipur became a Hinduised state during the reign of King Garib Niwas as a result of his conversion to Vaishnavism. Since then there had been a continuous process of Sanskritization in the state. And after 1891, Manipur become colonial state of British India. As a result of Hinduised state and Colonial state, Manipur continue to faced the problems of identity in all aspects of her life be it history, language, script, culture and even politics. However a powerful movement for revival of traditional Meetei religion, language and culture started during the 1930s in Barak Valley of Assam under the leadership of Laininghan Naoria Phulo and it reached to Manipur with vigor and continues even today. Presently maximum numbers of the Manipuris are followed with their traditional religion Sanamahism and minimum numbers of the Manipuris are also followed their religion with Hinduism. And the process for revival of the traditional Meetei religion and language is still continuing.

\textsuperscript{71} Moirangthem Imocha Singh, \textit{op.cit}, p.162