Chapter 2
MANIPUR: SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND CHANGE

Manipur has a distinct history chronicled in Puyas or Puwaries, namely; the Ningthou Kangbalon, Cheitharol Kumbaba, Ningthourol Lambuba, Poreiton Khunthokpa, Panthoibi Kongkul etc written in the archaic Meitei script. Since 33 A.D. till the last rule of the King Bhudhachandra, Manipur was ruled by seventyfour kings, of whom the hallowed names of Pakhangba, Naotthingkhong, Loyumba, Kiyamba, Khagemba, Charairongba, Pamheiba, Jai Singh, Gambir Singh, Nara Singh, Chandrakriti and Chura Chand Singh are outstanding (Singh 1988: ii). Manipur lost its sovereignty after its defeat from the British in the Anglo- Manipuri War of Kongjom in 1891 A.D. It regained with its freedom from the British rule on 28 August 1947. Thereafter, the land was annexed to the Indian territory on 15 October 1949 and, on 21 January 1972, it was accorded statehood by the Indian Government after several years of demand by All Manipur Students Union and several political organizations (A.M.C.T.A.2001: 4-7). Of the different accounts about the origin of the name ‘Manipur’, the one in a Manipuri manuscript Sating Sakok says that at a place near Nungoibi, located between Taipongthong and Nungoibi, a stone existed with supernatural power, known as *mani*, meaning a precious gem stone, by which, the place came to be known as Manipur (Singh 1969:2). According to Brown (2002:2), the name ‘Manipur’ is accounted for by the Manipuris who quote the Mahabharata to confirm its accuracy and say that the name derives from *mani*, jewel; earlier, possessed by the king of the country ages ago. The country, at a time, was named Mahendrapur or Mahendrapahar, but a king, Babra Baha, who happened to possess the jewel, changed the name into Manipur. However, according to the legends current in Manipur, the country at a time was water-logged and not fit for human habitation which was blessed by the Great God Siba and Uma, known among the Manipuris as Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi respectively, as they descended on it from heaven in search of a suitable spot to perform the Lai Haraoba or Ras Dance (merry making dance of the Gods), a dance Vishnu had performed with Radha and Gopi attendants in his incarnation as Krishna. The Snake God Ananta witnessed the Ras Dance of Siba and Uma by lighting the *mani* (magic gem) on his head for days
and nights in the entire country. From that mani, the name Manipur, meaning the city of the Gem, was derived (Singh1987:55-56). According to the Sanamahi Laikan, a Manipuri historical work, the name Manipur was officially introduced in the early 18th century, during the regime of the King Garibniwaz (Singh 1973:50) who adopted Hinduism as religion for his kingdom while in the later part of the 18th century the King Jai Singh (1763-1798 A.D.) named the land Kangleipak (Kabui 1991:1). However, neighbours knew the land and her people by different names such as the Shans or Pongs of upper Burma with whom the land had political and cultural contacts called it Cassay, the Burmese called it Khathe, the Cachar people called it Moglei and the Assamese called it Meklee (Singh 1988:3-4) while the name recognised among its people is Meitrabak or the country of the Meitei and the name Manipur comes after the adoption of Vaishnavism, as the word Manipur itself is of the Sanskrit origin. The history of manipur with changing nomenclatures has been unfolding over centuries on a land of varied characteristics and resource potential.

In the northeast India, Manipur is bounded by Nagaland on the north, Myanmar on the south and northeast, Mizoram on the southwest and Assam on the west. The state lies between the latitudes 23° 83’ N and 25°68’ N and the longitudes 93°03’ E and 94°78’ E. It is divided into two regions, namely; the Hills and the Imphal Valley. The total area of the state is 22,327 sq. km, of which one tenth (2,238 sq.km) covers the valley and the remaining (nine tenths) cover the hills. The valley is about 790 metres above the sea level in the northern side while in the hills the average elevation is from 1,500 metres to 1,800 metres. It has annual rainfall of 1467.5 m.m. and a sub-tropical monsoon type of climate in which the summer months are hot and wet while the winter months are cold and dry. The hills of Manipur comprise two groups; namely, eastern hills and western hills. The eastern hills consist of Siroi, Mapithel, Chingai, Malain, Ango- Ching and Yamadung whereas the western hills consist of Tenipu, Koubru, Iso, Leikat and Tamphaba. Parallel to them are the ranges of Uningthou, Koubru, Khoupum, Nungba, Kalong, Nungjabung and Haobi. Besides these, there are also small mountains such as Nongmaijing, Langol, Chingmairong, Chinga etc. (Singh 2000:5-6). The formation of the central plain of Imphal valley, according to E.W. Dun, owes to a stream blocked by some convulsion of nature, i.e., the plain was formed as a result of its filling by river- borne sediments (Kabui 1991: 9). But the geologists explained that the valley was formed due to rise of the southern mountains which led to reversal of the drainage system and impounding of water in
the areas, now, consisted of lakes and swamps (Ansari 1985:61-66). As a result, Manipur has a number of rivers and streams traversing her mountains and valleys. Of the rivers, all but the Leimatak, flow from north to south. Barak, the longest and largest river, originates from a point of northern hills, flows through western and southern hills to the Cachar region of Assam and Surma valley of Bangladesh and is joined by Irang and Makru rivers of the Tamenglong district as its tributaries. The Imphal River, originating from the hills in the north of the valley, traverses the valley and then flows through Chin Hills to the Chindwin in Myanmar (Burma). The Imphal river, along with Iril, Thoubal and Nambul rivers, makes the ecological environment for the Meitei civilization (Kabui 1991:9-10). Besides, Manipur has many lakes and marshes. Of these Loktak is the biggest fresh water lake, on the banks of which came up the principalities of Moirang and Khuman. Waithou, Ikop and Kharungpat lakes situated in the east of Imphal river have served as the fisheries. Among the well known marshes are Utrapat, Sangaipat, Lamphelpat etc. The lakes, rivers, marshes and the mountains are interwoven in the life, culture and tradition of the people. Whoever occupied the fertile river basin also occupied the economic power and controlled the state system (Kabui 1991:9-10).

Geo-politically, the state of Manipur also carries strategic importance for international trade and commerce with the South-Asian countries as the state has shared its entire border with Myanmar. Roads and airways are the two important means of transport in the state. The National Highway No. 39 (Indo-Burma Road) which leads to Myanmar through the town of Moreh in Manipur and the National Highway No. 53 (Cachar Road), leading from Silchar town of Assam, passing through Jiribam in Manipur, connects the state with other parts of the country. Among the state highways, the Tidim road, Imphal-Sugnu road, Imphal-Kangchup road, Imphal-Ukhrul road, Imphal-Tamenglong road etc, are the important roads. The major district roads include Bishnupur, Nungba, Moirang-Kumbi, Wabgai-Kakching, Ukhrul-Somdal etc. Air transport is another important mode of transport in Manipur. There is air link of Imphal with Kolkata, Delhi, Guwahati and Patna. After this brief introduction of history and geography, a discussion on society, polity and economy is taken up.
Society

According to Census 2001 the population of the state is 22,93,896, comprising 11,61,952 males (50.65%) and 11,31,944 females (49.35%). The density of the population is 103 persons per square kilometre. Out of this total population, 8,82,130 (38.46%) persons are settled in the hills and 14,11,766 (61.54%) in the valley. The density of the population in the hills is 44 persons per square kilometre and in the valley, it is 631 persons per square kilometre. Manipur is the state of the ethnic plurality and the home of many indigenous communities, big and small, particularly those who have migrated from eastern and western directions in the search for fortune and glory. The Meitei, Naga and Kuki are the major ethnic groups of the state. Most of the people predominantly belong to the Mongoloid racial stock, except for the Manipuri Muslims, the Manipuri Brahmins and some of the new migrants from Assam and Bengal called Lairikyengbams (translators) (Devi 2002:2). The people settled in the hills are mainly the Scheduled Tribes, falling either under the Naga fold or the Kuki. According to the Census 2001, the tribal population of the state is 7,41,141, representing 32.31% of total population of Manipur (Govt. of Manipur 2007-08:16). The valley of Manipur is inhabited by the Meiteis, the Manipuri Muslims and people coming from other parts of India such as Mayang and Nepali. Meiteis form the major ethnic group in the valley. The tribal settlement is also found near the market place in the valley. Khwairamband Bazaar is now mainly occupied by the Mayangs who are the descendents of the Hindus, emigrated from the western direction of Manipur. However, in some parts of the valley, generally in the periphery, one finds indigenous scheduled caste communities known as the Loi and the Yaithibi (Devi 2002: 3-4).

Thus, the Manipuri society ethnically comprises two broad groups of population; viz., population of Meitei, Meitei Pangal, Loi and other groups in the Imphal Valley and the tribal population in the hills. Both the groups ethnically represent several groups and hence make a multi-ethnic society of Manipur. Its ethnic structure is discussed here.

The Meitei

Meiteis forming a majority in the population of the state have evolved over a long period of assimilation and integration through war, conquest and matrimonial alliances. The origin of the Meitei is shrouded in mystery, and the studies on the
subject are greatly influenced by the religious faiths and political ideologies of the Meiteis themselves, making the problem highly speculative and controversial. There are, therefore, different schools of thought regarding their origins which are given below.

(i) Some people considered Manipuris as the descendants of Tartar Colony from China (Pemberton 1966: 37-38).

(ii) Others considered that the Manipuris were descendants of the surrounding hill tribes, i.e., the big race of Nagas which once existed in many parts of the world (Hodson 1991; Brown 2001). The Manipuris are related to the present Naga people of the hills in respect of many customs which are common still in both groups.

(iii) Some scholars consider that the Manipuris are Kshatriyas as mentioned in the Epic, 'Mahabharata' (Singh 1966:56).

(iv) For Gangmumei Kabui (1991:56), Meitei had been found in the pre-history and proto-history. He narrates a legend: “Atiya Sidaba asked Ashiba to create a man. Ashiba created an Ngamu fish which was not accepted. Then, he created monkey, which did not satisfy him. Ultimately, Ashiba was asked to create man in the image of God (Atiya Sidaba). Form of man was thus created but there was no life. So, Atiya Sidaba breathed life into the form and man was thus created”.

(v) According to L. Bino Devi (2002:12), ‘Meiteis regarded Koubru as their first settlement area. So, lord Koubru of the Koubru hill is regarded as one of the most important deities of the Meiteis.

Although the scholars have different views about the origin of the Meitei, it is well known historical fact that the term Meitei was applied after Nongda Lairen Pakhangba ascended the throne at Kangla and consolidated other groups under his control politically and socially (Singh 1991:15).

From the view point of integration of society, one finds four important structural units in Manipuri society; namely, clan, lineage, family and marriage. Within the Manipuri society, the nature of these units is not the same across the ethnic groups and this situation poses heterogeneity of the social structure. Rather, one may talk of social structures within the social structure of Manipur. However, it is neither possible to lay bare the structures of all the ethnic groups nor is it relevant here to do so. The Loi social structure closely follows the Meitei social structure and, therefore, the Meitei social structure is discussed here.


**Clan**

The meitei society is divided into seven clans from the historical time; viz, Ningthouja, Khumal, Luwang, Angom, Moirang, Khabangana and Sarangleisangthem. The vernacular name for clan is ‘salai’. Each of these salais is subdivided into a number of yumnaks (lineages) and the numbers of yumnaks vary from clan to clan, as Ningthouja has 116 yumnaks; Luwang has 45 yumnaks; Khuman has 100; Angom has 52; Moirang has 55 and Khabangana has 47 yumnaks respectively (Singh 1987:201-206). The heads of the certain clans are designated as Ningthou or Piba who represent their respective sibs in both theological and social organizational functions. There is a rule that a Piba must marry a girl of higher status and not the one of inferior status, and only the eldest son of the head of a sib or sub-sib is allowed to be Piba. Earlier, role of the Piba was associated with political authority of the principality as well as an instrument of integrating social segments, but today his important function is to worship ‘Taibangpanba Mapu’, the supreme god of the universe, for the well-being of the members of his clan. Thus, the Piba is a very important social institution in the societal system of traditional as well as modern Meitei society (Hodson 1908:73-74).

**Lineage**

The Meitei society is patrilineal and patrilocal. Father is the head of the family, and the lineage goes through father’s line. The married women have almost no right on the property of their father. All the movable and immovable property of the deceased father is inherited only by the sons and unmarried daughters. And the share of the property which belongs to unmarried sisters usually goes to their brothers after their death (Singh 1998:187).

**Family**

The Meitei family is an extended family system, having a father, a mother, a married son, a daughter-in-law and other children, including one or two grand children. When the father dies, his eldest son inherits authority of his father and enjoys his authority and command. Sometime, separate family system of son is also established before the death of his parents. Parents also accept the idea of separate family if this is required. However, there is no customary law prescribing that a married son should separate from his parents and establish his own family (Singh 1998:168).


*Marriage*

The Meiteis are exogamous with regards to clan and are endogamous with regards to their own society. Among the Meiteis two marriage types are prevailing; namely, (i) marriage by negotiation and (ii) marriage by love or elopement.

Generally marriages are settled by their guardians. But very often understanding for marriage is reached between a boy and a girl before formal consent of their guardians is obtained. In negotiation of marriage, a proposal, either by boy’s parents or by their agents, is discussed with the girl’s parents and the formal talk between the parents of both the sides for a final decision is reached when a ritual *waroipot* is held to signify the agreement to give the girl in marriage to the boy. However, *waroipot* is also held in the marriages by love or elopement where it depends on the willingness of both the parties. After the waroipot, a ceremony ‘Heiching Kharai Puba’ (seven kinds of fruits, of which amla is a must, are placed in a karai, a carrier made of thin bamboo pieces) is performed, which the Meiteis tradition regarded as the price of the bride, and the father of the groom handed it over to bride’s father. One day before the marriage ceremony is performed; the groom is given a formal invitation for marriage by younger brother of the bride. On the day of the marriage, rituals are performed both at the residence of the groom and the bride. Therefore, marriage cannot be held in a ritually impure period in either of the families. After the marriage is over, the bride is taken to the groom’s house where she is welcomed by her mother-in-law embracing her in arms. On sixth day a grand feast is organised by the parents of the bride, in which both the parties participate. Remarriage of the widow and divorce are also permissible in the Manipuri society. But no rituals are performed in widow marriage. Only a ceremony *loukhatpa* (acceptance) is performed for social recognition of the relationship between the husband and the wife (Singh 1991:129-131).

In sum, the different structural units of the Meitei society performed different functions for the continuity and effective maintenance of the social structure.

*The Meitei- Pangal ( Manipuri Muslims)*

Muslims from various states of India are believed to have immigrated to Manipur in the past. R. Brown (2001:14) in his “Statistical Account of Manipur” writes that there is a considerable population of Muslim descendents of settlers from Bengal for the most part, chiefly residing to the east of the capital.
It is also believed that a large section of the Muslims came from Sylhet in 1606 A.D. during the reign of the king Khagemba. As there was a dispute between Khagemba and his brother Sanongba on the issue of a broken boat of Sanongba. Sanongba fled to Sylhet where he begged for help from the rulers and came back to Manipur with some armies of the Sylhet. During this war, Sanongba was defeated and the soldiers were made prisoners who were Muslims (Bareh 2001:301-302). Presently, they are concentrated mainly in the Imphal, Thoubal and Bishnupur districts and their population is 1, 90,939 (7.99%) out of the total population of Manipur (Census 2001).

The Loi

Lois are one of the seven scheduled caste communities found in Manipur. The other scheduled caste communities are Yaithebi, Dhobi, Muchi or Rabidas, Namsudra, Patni and Sutradhar. According to R. Brown (2001:14), the Lois are not recognised as pure Manipuri. They appear to be the descendents of the former inhabitants of the Moirang, one of the original tribes, which formerly occupied the valley to the south. They were formerly independent but they were subdued ages ago by the Meiteis. Hence, the name Loi, meaning subdued, was given to them after their subjection. They are settled in 32 villages, out of which eight villages have been notified as Scheduled Caste Loi villages; viz, Sekmai, Khurkhul, Koutruk, Phayeng, Andro, Leimaram, kwatha and Tairenpokpi. According to the Census 2001, the Loi population is 51.668 (2.16%) out of the total population and 86.1% of the scheduled caste population of Manipur.

The Yaithibi

The term Yaithibi is used by the Meiteis for those people who were expelled from meitei society by the King Garibniwaz for violating social customs. In this socially ostracised group the prisoners of the war were also included (Bareh 2001:264). They are settled at Thoubal Khunou, five kilometres to the east of Thoubal Bazar. According to Census 2001, their population is 532 (0.9%) out of the total scheduled caste population of the state.

The Mayang

To R. Brown Mayangs are the descendents of the Hindus who originally emigrated from the west, as well as those people who were captured by the Manipuris in arms against them. In the past, they were settled in a village called Mayang Imphal. However, the place was deserted after the Burmese invasion in 1824 A.D. and they
have scattered all over the valley. Presently, they are occupying Khwairamband bazaar, the main market place of Manip.

*The Nepali*

Nepalis, concentrated in the north and central district of Manipur, started to settle in the last part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Some people believe that Nepali settlement in the state dates back to 1885 A.D. at Koirengei. However, it is found that they had settled in Manipur even before this date as the memorial stone of the Subedar Hemchand Shai of 44th Gorkha Rifles, who died in 1881 A.D, in Manipur is still with the 4th Assam Rifles Division (Bareh 2001:284-285). Thus, it seems that their settlement was established in the initial years at Gowaltabi, Tobong, Kangpokpi, Kanglatombi and Erang.

*The Nagas*

The tribes of Manipur who are now under the Naga fold are among the earliest inhabitants of the hills of Manipur. The name Naga was given to them by the British administrators with their policy of identifying and classifying the tribes of Nagaland and Manipur (Singh 1995:25-29). The tribes which are under the Naga fold are Anal, Angami, Chiru, Kabui, Kacha Naga, Koireng, Kom, Mao, Maring, Seema, Tangkhul, Chothe, etc. Sub-groups of the Naga fold and their population is shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Sub-group</th>
<th>Population in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anal</td>
<td>13853 (4.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angami</td>
<td>650 (0.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiru</td>
<td>5487 (1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabui</td>
<td>62216 (18.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kacha Naga</td>
<td>20328 (5.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koireng</td>
<td>1056 (0.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kom</td>
<td>15467 (4.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mao</td>
<td>80568 (23.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maram</td>
<td>10510 (3.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maring</td>
<td>17361 (5.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seema</td>
<td>25 (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangkhul</td>
<td>112944 (32.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chothe</td>
<td>2675 (0.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>343140 (100)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://nagawiki.com
The data shows that out of the thirteen sub-types of Naga, Tangkhul Naga is the major sub-types of Naga groups representing near about one third (32.91%) of all the Naga population, followed by Mao Naga with near about one fourth (23.48%).

Though the issue of the origin and migration of the Nagas as a whole remain as yet unsettled among the scholars, the Manipuri Naga tribes point to Makhel in Mao area of Nagaland as the place of their origin, from where they migrated to the present habitat. R. Brown (2001:16) said that simply the geographical position of the tribes, their facial characteristics, customs etc. indicated that the Nagas originally came from the north. Presently, these tribes occupy different areas of the Manipur hills with a well-maintained territory. The Zeliangrong tribes occupy the western hills of Manipur. The Rongmeis are a widely dispersed community and settle down in the Senapati district of Manipur. The Tangkhuls are the most numerous tribes and occupy the northern hills of Ukhrul district. Many of them have also settled down in the valley and foot hills. Marings occupy Tengnoupal area of Chandel district whereas Moyan, Monshang, Lamgang, Anal, Tarao and Chothe are found in Chandel and Chakpikarong area of Chandel district.

The Kukis

The Kuki tribes of Manipur are a branch of the great Kuki-Chin family which is both a linguistic group as well as a cultural entity. Linguistically, Kuki-Chin is a sub-family of the Tibeto-Burman group, comprising the Kuki, Chin, Mizo and Meitei speakers. As an ethno-cultural entity, the term excludes the Meitei but covers the Kuki, Chin, Mizo and other cognate tribes and clans. The evolution of this collective name is the outcome of the colonial imposition of a common identity and search for a common ethnic identity on the part of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo people themselves. Kuki is not a very old name. To their immediate neighbours of Bengal and Tripura, it means the hill people or mountaineers. However, they are known as Kongsai or Khongjai among the Meiteis (Singh 1995:34). The Kuki-Chin tribes are Thadou, Paite, Gangte, Simte, Vaiphei, Sahte, Zou, Hmar and Mizo concentrated, mainly found in north Manipur, south Manipur, Tengnoupal and west Manipur boarding the north Cachar hills district (now Dima Hasao) of Assam. Gantes are found in 37 villages of Manipur but they are mainly concentrated in Chuchandpur district. Paite, Simte, Vaiphei, Sahte, Zou, Hmar and Mizo tribes are settled in the foothills of Manipur valley (Bareh 2001:148-260). Sub-groups of the Kuki fold and their population is shown in the following table:
The data indicate that Thadou is the major sub-type of Kuki groups representing two fifths (39.02%) of the whole Kuki population followed by 15.22% of Paite and 14.48% of Hmar tribes.

Thus, the resource base of the Manipuri society consists of typical topography and multi-ethnic demography which interact with each other and figure out a typical structure of society, polity, economy and culture. The social structure of Manipur is revealed in the following analysis.

**Polity**

Over the centuries of evolution, the Manipuri society had developed a political and administrative structure which had been shaping and reshaping under impact of
indigenous and extraneous forces. The traditional political of Manipur set up consisted of the kings, panas, lallups and slaves. These traditional political set up is presented here.

*The Kingship*

The establishment of Meitei kingdom of Kangla under the Nongda Lairen Pakhangba was the establishment of kingship system in Manipur. The establishment of kingdom was the outcome of the struggle between various ethnic groups and clan chiefdoms in the valley. Historically, Manipur valley was occupied by several tribes, the principal of which were seven in number, viz., (i) the Ningthouja or Meitei, (ii) the Angom, (iii) the Khumal, (iv) the Moirang, (v) the Luwang, (vi) the Sarang-Leishangthem and (vii) the Khaba-Nganba. (Brown, 1975: 57; Hodson, 1909: 5-6). These tribes had their own principality and were independent of each other. A continuous struggle among these principalities to overpower one another was a common phenomenon until the emergence of the Ningthoujas or Meiteis as the supreme power. For one time the Khumal appeared to have been the most powerful and after its decline the Moirang became prominent. And ultimately the Ningthoujas or Meiteis under the kingship of Pakhangba, subdued the whole and ruled over them. The king was the administrative head and used to rule the kingdom through a number of local level administrators. The Imphal area was divided into four quarters for effective administration; namely, (i) the Yaiskul under Yaiskullakpa, (ii) Khwai under Khwairakpa, (iii) Khurai under Khurailakpa and, (iv) Wangkhei under Wangkheilakpa. The princes were usually appointed to be the lakpas of these four quarters.

*Pana System*

The Meitei society constituted by seven clans was organised on the basis of the Pana system. According to T.C. Hodson, the country was divided into six panas. They were Ahallup, (the club of the old men), Naharup (the club of the young men), Laipham (abode of the gods), Khabum (great house of Khaba), Hithakphanba (gatherer of tobacco) and Potshangba (watchmen). Each Pana consisted of a number of families and the head of each family would select the men who could render service to the King for and on behalf of the Pana which they belong to. Every Meitei must belong to one of these Panas. Those who did not belong to these Panas were not regarded as pure Meiteis. Therefore, a person whether a Loi or tribe in order to become Meitei must be assigned to one of these Panas known as “Pana Thokpa”
Thus, the basis of the organization becomes more functional rather than territorial as it is organised on the basis of the Sagais or Yumnaks and played a very important role in the social and political life of the Meiteis in the past. However, the Pana system has disappeared from the modern Manipuri society and only a small organization known as Singlup (Sing=wood, Lup= organization) for every leikai is found, now.

**Lallup System**

It was a system of feudal service rendered by the subjects to the king or the state. The meaning of the Lallup is war organization (Lal= war, Lup= organization). However, it covered not only military works but also all the works for social development. It manifests the emergence of feudalism in social, administrative and political organization of the Meitei kingdom. In the Lallup system, a person had to attend to royal office for ten days and had to do work according to his grade as well as for the remaining twenty days of a month he did manual work. Thus, during the time of the war the liable person of the Lallup did military services and in the time of peace he did work for economic development. The liability of Lallup commenced as soon as a man reached the age of seventeen when he became entitled to cultivate one ‘pari’ of land (about one hectare), with the tax in kind exacted by the king. And the persons liable to duty under the Lallup system were the Meiteis, the Brahmins and the Meitei Pangans (Musalmans) (Hodson 1904: 59-64). However, Lallup system was abolished after Manipur came under the British rule in 1891.

**Slavery**

The slavery system had been an aged-old institution in the Manipuri society since the time of king Kiyamba (1467-1508). Col. Mc Cullock described two systems of slavery in Manipur: (i) those people for for discharging a money debt which they can’t otherwise do and (ii) those because of their sheer laziness. They live in the same house with their masters, eat with him and are altogether like members of the family. He further said that the abuse and ill-use of slaves is the exception in the Manipuri society. It remarks more especially to Manipuris in the state of slavery. There are two descriptions of slaves; one- the absolute property of the buyer called “menai-machaanaba”, the other ashalba whom money is paid in advance and may not be paid back. The latter is like giving work in view of the interest of the money paid. In this case when the persons who became ashalba got sick, he is obliged to give a substitute
of him. To ashalba no considerable sum would be advanced unless he promised to work for at least one cultivating season (Mc Cullock 1980: 24-25).

The slavery in Manipur was a product of indebtedness, laziness, criminal activities, adultery and conquest. Among the Manipuries, debt was a cause of slavery and indebtedness was mainly due to poverty. A poor person sometimes borrowed money from the rich people, for which he had to work for the creditor as domestic servant, without wages as the interest of the money; he had borrowed, until and unless he cleared the dues. If he died without clearing dues, his son also became slave. Also from the sheer poverty, a man sold himself as slave. Poor and lazy person instead of labouring hard for the betterment of their conditions becomes the slave of the rich families. Criminals and thieves become slaves for the rich persons who save them from the heavy punishments (Singh 1968:216-222).

**Polity under the British Period**

After the Anglo-Manipur War of 1981, Manipur came under the direct control of British rule. It was made obligatory for the king to obey all the orders of the British government. He could remain in power as long as British want him. During this period from 1891 till the independence of India, a number of significant changes have been made under the leadership of Maxwell, the political agent and the Superintendent of the State. The British introduced the Ratwatwari system of land holding, according to which anyone having a claim on land after 1892 was to obtain a patta from the government. These patta holders were given inheritable and transferable rights on their land at a uniform land tax of Rs. 5 per pari (one hectare) (Singh 2011:33-34). The British considered Lallup system as an exploitative system for the poor as the nobles and rich people were never attended to such service. Therefore on April, 1892, age-old tradition of lallup was abolished by the British government. Besides Lallup, they also abolished potang in June 1913 as the custom was often misused by the nobles and had became a means of exploitation of the people in remote villages by the state officials (Singh 1998:50-54). The British followed a dual policy in the administration of Manipur. Imphal valley was governed in the names of king involving the traditional nobles while the hills were exclusively administered by the British through the Lambus representatives and messengers of the government. Moreover, a regular police was created in order to maintain law and order. At rural level a Chawkidar was appointed by the villagers subject to the approval of Political Agent for every hundred houses. A state police force was
stationed at Imphal. A military force was also raised in order to protect the frontier and prevent inter-tribal conflict among the hill tribes. A refined judicial system was also introduced. A town Panchayat court was established in the Imphal. However, Durbar was the highest court of appeal. For the serve punishment like death sentence, transportation of life and imprisonment for more than seven years, a confirmation of the Chief Commissioner of Assam was required (Singh 1989:5-6; Singh 1998:41-42). This British paramouncy continued till 1947.

**Political Status after Independence**

Manipur get its independence from the British ruled in 1947. A a responsible form of government was established in Manipur in 1947 under the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947. The constitution was enacted by the caretaker who was nominated by the Maharaja of Manipur, Shri Bodhachandra Singh with 7 members from 14 August 1947 to 7 August 1948 (Singh 1992:28). For the first time, there was held elections in Manipur on 11 June 1948 Known as “Manipur State Assembly Elections” Under the Manipur Constitution Act. These were the first democratic elections held in Manipur. The elections were based on adult franchise and on the principle of joint electorate from General, Hill and Muhamened Constituencies at the ratio of 30:18:3 with two additional seats to represent educational and commercial interests. However, in spite of the introduction of election based on adult franchise, there was no full-fledged democracy under the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947, because the Maharaja of Manipur appointed his younger brother, M.K. Priyobrata Singh, as the Chief Minister of Manipur (Govt. of Manipur 1948:5). On 15 October 1949, the state was merged in the Indian Territory as a part C State ad administered by the President of India through a Chief Commissioner. It ceased to be a part C State on 1st November, 1956 and became a Union Territory under the Union Territorial Council Act, 1956. The territorial Council consisting of 30 elected member and 2 nominated members was constituted on 16th August 1957. However, the Territorial Council was replaced by a Territorial Legislative Assembly of 30 members and 2 nominated members from 23rd July 1963. The state was granted statehood in 1971 and the assembly election for 60 seats, which was earlier 30 seats, was held in 1972 (Singh 1981:174).

Thus, the polity of Manipur society transformed from the monarchical to the democratic form of government.
Economy

The economy of Manipur can be analysed in terms of three different stages; namely, (i) the feudal economy, (ii) the colonial economy and (iii) the Post-Independence economy. Under these stages, the economy is discussed here.

The Feudal Economy

The feudal economy of Manipur was basically agrarian in nature where agriculture was the mainstay of the economy. The inhabitants of the valley had specialized in wet rice cultivation while the hill people widely practiced jhum (shifting) cultivation. But the technique of shifting cultivation appeared to have been used for wet cultivation as the method of transplantation of paddy and use of plough were introduced in the valley only after the arrival of the Muslim war captives in the beginning of the 17th century (Singh 2011:102-103). The structure of the feudal economy is also defined by the landholding pattern of the prevailing period. The king had the sole ownership right over all the land. He distributed the land to the subjects on the basis of the system of Lallup. Every male who served as lallup was given one pari (hectare) of land for cultivation (Brown 2001:85). All the land under cultivation was taxed according to the category of land and taxes were paid in kind. These taxes ranged from 1% to 6% of the total produce on the best land and 2% to 12% of the total produce to the worst land (Singh 2005:151). The king used to make land grant to the nobles and officials in return of their services. Therefore best land was given to them in low rent.

Besides the rice production, other agro-based products of the valley were potatoes, sweet potatoes, brinjals, cucumber, pumpkins, onion, pepper, tobacco and different varieties of dhal. English vegetables like peas, cabbage, cauliflower, beans etc. were also raised. In the hills, rice, cotton, oil seeds, pepper, tobacco, vegetables of various kinds, potatoes, sweet potatoes, ginger etc., were produced (Brown 2001:84). However, except rice and cotton, other products were raised mainly for household consumption.

The state also had a rich forest resource. Among the forest resource, mention may be made of teak, bamboo, Indian-rubber, oak etc. Timber obtained from these forests had a ready market in Surma Valley of Assam. The people in both the valley and the hills had also developed animal husbandry. Among the animals raised were cow, buffalo, goat, duck, geese, pigeon, pig, fowl, cats and dogs. Besides it, fishing
was another activity of the people. The state has about 22 different kinds of fish which were found in the rivers and lakes, specially Loktak, Ekop and Waithou lakes (Brown 2001:8-9, 85-86).

However, the state was weak in manufacturing of products. Its manufactures were few and of subsistence nature, which comprised clothes, leather, cooking pots, pottery, jewellery, iron and steel, and carpentry etc. (Brown 2001:89). Weaving was the most important industry of the state. Raw cotton was ginned and spun into thread by women. The clothes produced were of excellent quality and cheap (Allen 2002:87). Another important manufacture was salt. It was an important item of trade as well as a source of revenue. There were four principal salt-wells; viz., Ningjel, Chandrakhong, Shikhong and Waikhong (Brown 2001:9-10). The state was not very much open to trade. Major trades were carried on with Cachar. Clothes, yams, buffaloes and ponies were exported and in the return of it betel nut and pan, cloth, yarn, brass, metals and hukas (Hubble bubble) were imported (Brown 2001:88).

The state had a very limited source of revenue. Although there was currency system, most of the taxes were paid in kind. Some of the sources of revenue were taxes on fishing, exports and imports, transit duties and tributes from the outcast communities (McCulloch 1980:36).

Thus, the feudal economy of Manipur may be characterised as self-sufficient and self-sustained system, largely insulated within the Imphal valley and without much interaction with outside world. The agrarian base of economy and egalitarian approach towards resource mobilization, particularly in relation to the collection of taxes, had made the feudal state economically weak.

The Colonial Economy

Manipur came under the indirect colonial rule after the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891 A.D. The colonial rule in the state led to the transformation of the traditional socio-economic and political structure. The feudal service of lallup was replaced by a uniform tax. The land holding system was also transformed and instead of it Rayatwari system of land holding based on private ownership was introduced. As a result, the king was deprived of the traditional right over land. With the monetization of economy and introduction of private property, the feudal economy began to give way to commercialization of agriculture. The closed agrarian economy of the state was opened and free trade was introduced. As a result, a number of Marwari businessmen entered Manipur and established their hegemony over the external and
internal trade of the state. The opening of cart route from Imphal to Dimapur via Mao in 1896 A.D. further added impulse to the ongoing trade (Allen 2002:112). However, the colonial trade policy had a negative effect for the emerging manufacturing activities in Manipur like weaving and salt manufacturing. The handmade garment products of Manipur could not compete with the machine-made products of the Britain. As a result, the traditional weaving faced gradual extinction. Besides price competition, cultural competition between the tradition and modernity had also caused a shift of the preference of the people towards British made clothes. The traditional salt making and metal industry were other victims, which declined due to the import of salt, aluminium and enamel products (Singh 2011:112-116).

Thus, the colonial government policy revolutionized agriculture by way of synchronizing land ownership; it routed the emerging manufacturing activities in Manipur by way of substituting local manufactures by cheap imported ones. While the people were experiencing export-led retardation, the economy was experiencing some sort of deindustrialization with a feeble trend towards tartarisation due to the little experience in trade and commerce.

The Post-Independence Economy

With the merger of Manipur to the Indian union in 1949, its economy also came under the purview of Indian planned economy. As agriculture sector has been the driver of the economy of the state, it is only expected that a significant size of the planned investment will flow in this sector in order to remove the institutional, infrastructural and market rigidities associated with the production and marketing of agricultural produce. The de-industrialization of manufacturing during the colonial period was not appreciable progress in this period. As the state has not so much natural resources except the cultivable land in the valley, industrialization of economy has been viewed as a daunting challenge. Moreover, the state does not have an indigenous entrepreneurial. Therefore, the government of Manipur decided that the state should act as the entrepreneur for the development of the industrial sector. Thus, the state undertakes the large and medium scale industrial projects and encourages small scale industries to grow under private initiative. The 1982 industrial policy of the state identified bamboo based industries, starch and glucose factory, mechanized dye house, cement factory, plywood factory and sugar factory for establishment under public sector. On the other hand, weaving, sericulture, traditional handicrafts and production of various electrical goods are encouraged under the private sector. The
government also arranged industrial training programmes to select people in these areas in order to accelerate the growth of entrepreneurial class. The government also adopted an initiative package to encourage the entrepreneur to establish industries in Manipur. It includes exemption from stamp duty and registration charges, allotment of government land at subsidized rate, government purchase, interest subsidy, exemption from sales tax, equipment subsidy and exemption of water tax (Industrial Policy Manipur 1982).

The government also decided to adopt a multi-dimensional strategy, which depends not only on subsidy regime but also optimized the state’s potential and offsets its disadvantages. Therefore, a policy programme was framed in 1990, with the main strategy to set up small scale industries based on available raw materials and local demands and to generate employment among the local people. It also emphasised the creation of an integrated investor-friendly environment, infrastructural development, maximizing resource utilization, quality improvement and skill up gradation, revival of sick industries and promotion of Indo-Myanmar border trade (Govt. of Manipur 1990).

In sum, the transition from the monarchical ruled to the democratic form of government also resulted in the transition of feudal economy to the agrarian economy and finally to the industrial economy.

Culture

The Manipuri culture has important components religion, food, dresses and festivals which reflects the culture. The salience of these are presented here.

Religion

Traditionally Meiteis had their own religion, which had its myths and legends, gods and goddess, priests and priestesses, rituals and festivals, though it was more or less akin to the animism of the tribals. They worship the Imung Lais (household deities), Umang Lais (forest deities) and Apokpa (ancestors). Sanamahi and Leimaren Sidabi are the two important household deities of the Meiteis. Sanamahi is kept in a narrow place of the south-western corner of house to worship. They also worship their ancestors known as ‘Apokpa’ or ‘Salai Pokpa’. The names of the Apokpas are Pakhangba for the Ningthouja clan, Poreiton for the Luwangs, Pureiromba for the Angoms, Khamdingon for the Khabananbas, Thangaren for the Khumans,
Ngangningsing for the Moirangs and Nungaoyumthangba for the Chengleis (Hodson 1908:99-100). Ancestor worship is well established throughout Manipur society and this ceremony is known as ‘Sagei Apokpa Khurumba’ or ‘Lai Chaklon Katpa’. Other important forest deities are Nongpok Ningthou, Panthoibi, Koubru, Thangjing, Marjing, Wangbrel etc.

They embraced Hinduism in 18th century and most of the Meiteis became the followers of Hinduism. But they did not give up worshipping their traditional deities and are still keeping most of their traditional basic elements which formed the core of the Meitei religion (Singh 1988:146). Thus, they observed ordinary rules of Vaishnavism in birth ceremonies along with a short worship of Imung Lais performed by the head of the household. The rites and ceremonies, consequent upon the death of the Hinduised Meiteis, are performed by the Brahmins whereas that of the non-Hindus are performed by their kinsmen. In case of the children, dying under the age of two years, burial takes place in a lonely place, and they are buried in a large pot or lidless coffin. Older children and adults are burnt by the side of the river or in the cremation ground. Shradha ceremony is performed generally after 11 to 13 days of the death of a person. Another rite, ‘Phiroi’ is also performed by the Meiteis after the completion of one year of the death of a person. It is regarded as the last rite for the dead person.

Food

Rice is the staple food both in the hills and the valley. This is due to the agricultural production of the state. The hill people prefer husked rice which become light redish after boiling. They take rice with meat, vegetables and sometimes with salt, chillies and dried fish. The people of the valley take rice with dried fish, vegetables and sometimes with fresh fish. Dried fish is most important item of food in day-to-day family diet of the people of Manipur. They very much relish plantain-trees, salt and chillies. Younger generation like to take rice with meat. Most of the people, both, in the hills and the valley chew betel leaf with betel nuts and lime, a large quantity of which is imported from Assam and Myanmar as the climatic condition of the state is not suitable to grow these.

Dress

The people of the valley of Manipur before the spread of modern education for the long past were cultured and well dressed. Traditionally, a Meitei man wore a dhoti, a shirt, and occasionally, a chador (clothsheet). The women wore a phanek
(mekhla in Assamese) covering the lower part of the body, blouse and innaphi (chador) round their body. However, with the spread of modern education and Christianity, the people of Manipur both the Meiteis and tribal are now changing rapidly. Educated young men and women have almost discarded their traditional dresses. They prefer European dress and now using knitted woollen jackets, trousers, shirts, coat, tie, shoe, etc. Women are using all kinds of modern dresses like skirt, mini, midi, sari, jeans, salwar, etc. with high heel shoes (Bareh 2001:243).

**Festivals**

Of several festivals celebrated by Meiteis, some are celebrated in the honour of the gods while others are performed to make a happy, friendly and co-operative way of living among various tribes and clans in Manipur.

These festivals may be grouped into two broad classes; namely, (1) Public festivals and (2) State festivals. Among the public festivals, there are three main streams; viz, (i) festivals of Hindu origin like Krishna Janma, Radha Astami, Rath Jatra, Holi, Jhulon Leela, Hari Swayan, Hari Uthan, Durga Puja, Shivaratri etc., (ii) traditional Meitei festivals like Chairaoba (New Year), Chingoi Irruppa (bathing in the stream of Chingoi), Emoinu Ahongbi, Ukhoi Kappa (shooting an arrow aimed at an idol), Heikru Hidongba (a boat race), Lai Haraoaba (merry making by the gods) etc. and (iii) festivals based on traditional Meitei customs, but influenced by the Hindu festivals such as Ukrong Hongba (replacement of old tree), Wa Hongba (replacement of a old bamboo tree), Lai Keithel Kaba (gods journey to market) and Mera Hao-Chongba (Singh 1991:225-247). However, now-a- days, among the festivals which are based on traditional customs but are influenced by Hindu festivals only Mera Hao-Chongba is performed and others exist only in name.

Thus, the components of Manipuri culture has undergone change as a result of Sanskritization and modernization.

**Interactions of Manipur with the Neighbours**

Manipur had a social and political relationship with the neighbouring regions. Kabomba (1523-1542 A.D) for the first time established marital relationship with the Ahom king Sahungmung. In return, an elephant named Tekhao Ngamba, an Ahom fishing trap (Tekhao roo) and aniseed (aromatic seed) were given as the presents from the Ahom king. During his reign, a trade route from Manipur to Assam was opened in 1536 A. D. Tripura was known to the Manipuris as Takhel. It is situated to the south
of Sylhet, which was the transit point for the Manipuris towards mainland India. Bengali migration in Manipur took place through Tripura. There were wars between Tripura and Manipur in 1533, 1634 and 1696. In 1534, a canal called Takhel Khong was dug in Manipur to commemorate the victory of Manipur over the Tripuris. The canal served as a useful boat-way and a water reservoir (Singh 1991: 71). Its contacts with the Mughals are traced to the time of Jahangir (1605-1622 A.D). Tobacco plants and tobacco smoking spread in Manipur in 1610 A.D from Bengal which was a part of Mughal Empire. During the reign of Khunjaoba (1652-1666 A.D) contacts increased between Manipur and Cachar both in trade and migration. In 1660 A.D, three families from Cachar came to settle in Manipur. Thereafter, a large number of elephants were imported from Assam.

The beginning of the 18th century led to the Manipuri king’s (Garibaniwaza, Bhaigyachandra’s) contacts with the Hindu states like Ahom and Tripura in the west in the field of trade, migration, matrimonial relationship and religion. King Garibaniwaza himself adopted Hinduism and proclaimed it as the state religion in 1714 A.D which intensified Manipur’s contact with the neighbouring Hindu Kingdoms like Ahom, Tripura, Coach Bihar and Sylhet. Matrimonial and military alliances were forged with these Hindu states (Kabui 1991: 154-297).

Conclusion

The historical transformation of Manipuri society from a tribal political form to a feudal social structure can be traced around 33 A.D when Pakhangba ascended the throne at Kangla and consolidated seven clans into Meitei confederacy. Also the Meitei culture took its root during his reign. Sagol Kangjei (Polo) was started during his period with maiden match between the chiefs of different principalities. Introduction of administrative reforms took place during the reign of King Loiyamba (1074-1122 A.D.) who introduced Pana system and systematized administrative divisions of the country by creating six lups. He distributed occupations to different families based on their skills. Ten state officials were assigned with the task of administering the land; namely, Pukhramba, Nongthomba, Khwairakpa, Yaiskullakpa, Hiyangloi, Chengaopa Halchapa, Yumangloi Halchapa, Yamangloi Chalchapa, Phamthathek and Naichummapakpa. King Kiyamba (1467-1507 A.D.) introduced the written Chronicle of the state where all the events were recorded to this chronicle.
known as 'Cheitharol Kumbaba'. He also introduced the system of Cheithaba in which the name of the entire year would be taken after the name of a person so that even illiterate citizens can remember the year. The worshipping of Vishnu was also started during his reign, although they were not converted into Hinduism. It was during the reign of Charairongba (1697-1709 A.D.) that transition from traditional Meitei society to a Hinduised Meitei society took place. During his reign there was a regular flow of Brahmin immigrants to Manipur. Many of them devoted to the worship of Vishnu and recitation of the Bhagavata Gita. Gradually, King Charairongba was drawn towards Vaishnavism as he was deeply religious person by temperament. For the first time, he was initiated into Hinduism and adopted the Sanskrit name Pitambar Singh. He started to worship Lord Krishna and was deeply involved in a spree of building of temples dedicated to Lord Krishna, Kali and others. However, Hinduism got its full swing momentum during the reign of Garibniwaza (1749-1798 A.D.) who declared Hinduism as the state religion and forbade consumption of meat and rearing of pigs and poultry. The use of Bengali script was introduced during his reign. For the first time the practice of burning dead bodies and bone gathering ceremony was introduced. He also introduced Gotra for the seven salais of Manipur. All the Meiteis and the king, after their conversion into Hinduism, were declared as the Kshatriya; the Brahmins formed a separate caste and social outcasts were put at the lowest level of untouchables. The Hindu concept of Sati dharma came into existence during the reign of Garibniwaza. Many Sati burnings were performed by the wives of the princes, the Brahmins and the court nobles. Example, in 1726 when Prince Murari died, his two wives performed Sati by burning themselves in the funeral pyre of the dead prince (Kabui 1991:258).

With the coming of Vaishnavism, the indigenous Meitei gods and goddesses were identified with the Hindu gods and goddesses. That is, Soraren, the King of heaven was identified with Indra, Nongpok Ningthou with Shiva Mahadev, Panthoibi with Durga or Parvati and so on. Some of the traditional Meitei festivals were also modified into Hindu names and forms. For example, Wakambung Chingnung Nongombi was replaced by Dasma Kwaktanba of Durga Puja. In the field of dance and music also new development had been taking place. King Jai Singh composed three forms of Ras dance, such as Kunjaras, Maharas and Basantararas from the combination of the traditional Meitei dance form and Vaishnavite theme (Kabui 1991:277). However, Hinduism could not change the hill peoples of Manipur and they
remained the practitioner of the animistic tribal religion for a long time. It was after the contact of the Britishers that Christianity was introduced in 1894 A.D at Ukhrul by Rev. Pettigrew and it attracted the tribal people (Sen 1992:28). The economy of Manipur still remains predominantly agriculture. It has very limited scope for industrialization due to inadequate availability of mineral resources, paucity of infrastructural facilities and limited size of local market. However, society has gone through a considerable change and development in all directions of livelihood, religious affinity and cultural identity. Most of these changes were brought about due to continuous social and cultural contacts with the neighbouring regions.

In sum, Manipur is the home of many indigenous communities settled in both the hills and valley, among which the Meitei is the majority group. Meiteis have their own traditional customs and religions, most of which have changed due to the continuous social and cultural contact with the neighbouring regions in its different historical periods. The Scheduled Castes like the Loi and Yaithibi also came under the traditional Meitei society. The Loi is the largest scheduled caste in Manipur, which have had an age-old tradition for centuries. The Lois and their tradition are introduced in the following chapter.

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