

# **Aspects of State Formation in Pre-Colonial Manipur**

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the award of the degree of*

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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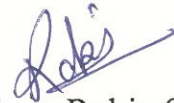
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## DECLARATION

I, declare that thesis entitled, "ASPECTS OF STATE FORMATION IN PRE-COLONIAL MANIPUR" submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University. To the best of my knowledge, this is my an original work.



Nongmaithem Robin Singh,

## CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.



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## Chapter.1

### Introduction: History and History Writing in Manipur

#### 1.1 Land and People: A Brief history of Manipur

Manipur is situated in eastern India, on a branch of the eastern Himalayas which protrude towards the south along the Indo-Burma border. To the north of Manipur is Nagaland, and to the east Myanmar/Burma. The state of Mizoram lies to the south west while Assam is its western neighbour. According to Gangumei Kabui, the present boundary of Manipur, with an area of 8628 sq. miles more or less, was fixed when a treaty was signed between Manipur, British India and Burma in 1834.<sup>1</sup>

Manipur can be divided geographically into the hills and, a centrally situated valley. The valley is oval in shape, 2600 feet above sea level and surrounded by hills on all sides. The valley of Manipur is surrounded by ranges of mountains namely, Koubru and Laimaton ranges in the west of valley, to the south is the Makui Longdi range, to the north, the Naga hills which is a part of Arakan range, to the east are the Siroi, Yamadong and Mapithel hills. Due to the geographical location, the valley was isolated and trade and commerce were very limited. These enormous hill ranges appeared to be an insurmountable barrier for the development process of the state but the Meiteis under the leadership of Ningthauja clans managed to progress from mere chiefdoms to the early state machinery.

While the mountain ranges isolated the valley from the neighboring states, a number of rivers and streams, which traversed through the mountains and reached the valley endowed the state and aided its development. The Barak is the longest and largest river, which flows through Manipur state. The Barak flows from north to west passes through Cachar and Surma valley in Bangladesh. The Barak however does not pass through the valley of Manipur. It is the Imphal or Manipur River that passes through the Manipur valley. It flows from north and becomes tributary of Chindwin River in Burma.

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<sup>1</sup> Kabui, Gangumei, Glimpses on Land and People of Ancient Manipur in Naorem Sanajaoba (ed.), *Manipur past and present vol-1, History, Polity and Law*, Mittal Publication, New Nelhi, 1988.p.8

Other rivers which flow through the valley are Iril, Thoubal and Nambul. The Manipur valley also had a large numbers of lakes, which have reduced over the years. The Loktak Lake is the biggest freshwater lake on whose banks the Moirang clan grew up. These rivers that run across the valley provide the main ecological environment for the valley, besides facilitating trade and commerce for the Meiteis.

Currently Manipur has also designated 34 tribes as being inhabitants of the state. However, historically, there have been identified four major ethnic groups: The Meiteis, The Nagas, The Kukis and The Meitei Pangals (Meitei Muslims). The first three groups are predominantly ‘mongoloid’ in appearance while the Pangals do not have a ‘mongoloid’ majority. The Naga tribes of Manipur consist of the Tangkhul, Zemei, Lianmei, Mao, Maram, Maring, Anal, Moyan, Monsang, Lamgang, Chothe, Purum, Thangal, and Koireng.<sup>2</sup> The Kuki tribe includes Thadau, Paite, Hmar, Vaiphei, Gante, Simte, Zou, Baite, Lushai, etc.<sup>3</sup>

The geographical dissection mentioned earlier was a determining factor in the socio-political, historical development of the state. The Manipur valley is extremely fertile enabling the development of a more robust socio-economic organization, which provided the seeds for the state formation of Manipur. Gangumei Kabui citing Alfred Lyall’s statement that “Manipur valley is an oasis comparative civilization amidst the barbarians”,<sup>4</sup> agrees with him. The valley is inhabited by the Meities who are in majority. It is because the Meiteis possessed the highly fertile land, and along with a more advanced technologies of agriculture and the concomitant economic and political organization were able to subdue the people of the surrounding hills whose environment did not foster similar developments.

Manipur literally means ‘the city or the land of gems’.<sup>5</sup> According to the text *Sanamahi Laikan*, the name Manipur was first officially introduced in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Garibniwas who was also known by the name Pamheiba.<sup>6</sup> Garibniwas was the king who made Hinduism the state religion of Manipur, discarding the old traditional faith of the Meitheis in early 18<sup>th</sup> century. After Hinduism became a

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid. p.19

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup>Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Singh ,O.Bhogeswar (edt), *Sanamahi Laikan*, Imphal, 1972.pp. 49-62



state religion, the socio-political organization of Manipur entered a new phase. The process of Hinduisation in Manipur thus became an important chapter in the history of Manipur.

Gangumei Kabui quoting P. Gunindro's work, *Coins of Manipur* suggested that Manipur was also known by the names like *Mekhala* and *Mekhaleswar*.<sup>7</sup> However, the above-mentioned names (*Mekhala* and *Mekhaleswar*) were not mentioned in the royal chronicles of Manipur. *Kangleipak*, *Porei* and *Meitrabak* were the given names of the Meitei kingdom in the royal chronicles and other literary works. The land and people were known by different names by the neighbouring states. The Shans or Pongs of upper Burma called it *Cassay* and *Kathe*, the Asamese name for Manipur and the inhabitants was *Meklee*.<sup>8</sup> According to Gangumei, the British East India Company also addressed Manipur as *Meckley*.

Historians of Manipur have generally divided the history of Manipur into three stages, namely, the ancient period referring to the period before the advent of Hinduism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the medieval Manipur period commencing with the process of Hinduisation until the advent of the British and, finally, the modern period beginning with the Anglo-Manipur war of 1891.<sup>9</sup> Scholars had often used the *puyas* (traditional texts of the Meiteis) to understand the history of Manipur prior to the arrival of the British. However, such scholars never questioned the authenticity of these *puyas*. Hence, the history of Manipur in the pre-colonial period requires a far more critical study as well as a critical engagement with the main source from which this history is understood, namely the *puyas*.

It has been accepted by many scholars that the Meitei kingdom was established as a result of frequent conflict as well as attempts to unify the many scattered clans of the region.<sup>10</sup> It is often accepted in Manipuri history that the Meitei community was formed

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<sup>7</sup>Op.cit.Kabui, and. Dr. N.N. Acharya, Manipur in the Eyes of Foreign Historians. In Naorem Sanajaoba (edit), *Manipur past and present vol-1, History, Polity and Law*, Mittal Publication, New Nelhi, 1988. pp.42-55

<sup>8</sup> Hodson, T C. *The Meiteis*, Low Price Publications, Delhi, 1999

<sup>9</sup> Manihar Singh, Ch. *A History of Manipuri Literature*. SahityaAkademi, New Delhi, 1996.

<sup>10</sup>Roy, Jyotirmoy, *History of Manipur*, K.L Mukhopadyay, Calcutta, 1958

Wangkhemcha Chingtamlen, *A Short History of Kangleipak*, K.K Printing, Imphal. 2005.

Kabui, Gangumei. *History of Manipur Vol-1, Pre-Colonial Period*, National Publishing House, New Delhi, 1991.

by the integration of seven clans. There, however, is no means of ascertaining what kind of government the Meiteis had before the 18<sup>th</sup> century although it is believed that a monarchy prevailed even in that period. Moreover, it is also not very clear what the religion of Manipur was in the early days, but there is no trace of Buddhism.

The history of Manipur took a new turn from the early 18th century with the arrival and acceptance of Hinduism. Charairongba (1697-1709) was the first Meitei ruler to patronize Hinduism. However, it was Garibniwas (1709-1748) who changed the entire course of Manipuri history in terms of religion and society. Garibiniwas adopted Hinduism as the religion of his state and, with this adoption, Meitei society became increasingly more rigid and stratified.

This small state became visible in colonial writings for the first time in 1762 when the ruler had an encounter with the British. According to British records, a draft treaty between the Hari Das Gossain, on behalf of the raja Jai Singh, and Harry Verelst (what post Harry Vereslt held at the time was unclear, but he was Governor of Bengal Presidency later, from 1767-1769) was made on 14 September 1762 and the final treaty was signed on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1763.<sup>11</sup> The treaty was signed between the two in order to help Jai Singh in recovering territory that he had been dispossessed of by the Burmese. In return, Jai Singh was ready to pay a huge amount of money and also all the expenses of all the British East India Company troops. However, the treaty did not yield any results and, practically, the connection between the little state and the British East India Company can be said to have actually begun in 1824. The occasion however was similar with the British East India Company being invited to protect the Manipur raja against the incursions of Burma.

With the help of British East India Company, Manipur regained the sovereignty from Burma in 1826 and they co-operated with each other on several fronts such as maintaining the Sihar-Imphal Road (for better trade and communication), in dismantling various plots to overthrow the Meitei kings by the members of king's family and also rebellions against the British in the Naga Hill Territories; British intelligence aligned with King Chandrakriti when Debendro Singh tried to usurp Chandrakriti's throne. Apart from this, Chandrakriti supported British expeditions when the Nagas attempted to remove

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<sup>11</sup> *Anglo-Manipur Treaty. Home Dept, 1762, 4 Oct., Nos 2-3.*

British authority in the Naga Hills. In order to maintain the relationship between Manipur and British, Lt. Gordon was appointed as the first Political agent in Manipur in 1835. The Political Agent in Manipur took on the task of looking into the feuds between Manipur and Burma over territory. The Political Agent did not interfere in the internal matters till 1891. However, the relationship between the Manipur rulers and the British became strained from 1890 onwards due to various reasons; these included religious reasons such as when, according to Johnstone,<sup>12</sup> a British officer shot a cow in public, which brought about wide protests by the people of Manipur valley; custom dues were also imposed on articles imported by the Meitei king, and, most importantly, because the British came to interfere in the various factions among the princes with the British often supporting one faction over the other

Maharaj Chandrakriti (1850-1886) had died leaving behind eight sons. Before his death, he distributed the offices among his sons, Surchandra was to be the Maharaja, Pakka Sana as Sagol Hanjaba ('In-charge of the horse'), Kesharjit as ShamuHanjaba ('In-charge of the elephant'), Gopal Sana as Dolai Hanjaba ('In-charge of the palanquin'), Kulachandra as Jubaraj(It is not clear what post was assigned to him),Koireng or Tikendrajit as Senapatti ('Chief of Army'), Jhalakriti as 'Chief of Army', and Angou Sana as 'Officer in charge of Roads'. Soon after, Surchandra ascended the throne in 1886, he was attacked in his palace at night and driven out by Kulachandra in September 1890. Surchandra fled to Cachar, and then proceeded to Calcutta in the quest for help. The British Government then ordered the Chief Commissioner of Assam to proceed to Manipur and carry out their decision, including the arrest of Senapatti Koireng who masterminded the incidents of September 1890.

A meeting was held on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1891 to talk about the various issues that occurred in the last few months between the Meitei king and the British government. Kulachandra, the maharaja of Manipur, started questioning the authority of the British Government to interfere in the internal affairs of Manipur. Strong guards were posted from both sides. The tension between the Meitei troops and British troops rose and led to the fight in which five officers, namely Mr.Quiton, Col.Skene, Mr.Cossins, Lt. Simpson,

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<sup>12</sup>Johnstone described the advent of killing cow as an untoward event that should have never occurred. Johnstone, James. *My Experience in Manipur and Naga Hills*. Gyan Publications, New Delhi,2002.,p.226.

Mr. Grimwood, and a sepoy were executed viciously. In a week's time a strong force of army led by General Collet marched from Cachar towards Manipur. On 27<sup>th</sup> of April the army led by Collet hoisted the Union Jack over the capital and, thus, Manipur lost her independence.

I will discuss the writings of Manipur history by both Manipuri historians and colonial officers in my next section. However, it is my contention that despite several works emerging in the post-colonial period, proper research on the Manipur state formation has not been carried out by any scholars till now. I would like to proceed to provide a systematic study on the process of Manipur state formation. My thesis will focus on the process of the assimilation of different clans/tribes to form the Meitei kingdom. Further, the intention of this thesis lies in answering questions such as: How did the Meiteis achieve territorial sovereignty over various tribes in Manipur? What were their legitimizing strategies? And How did the Meitei kings' alliance with British lead to a further development in Manipuri statehood?

## **1.2 Historiography**

### **(a) Manipuri historians**

Until the 1960s, scholars of Manipur such as Pandit Atombapu Sharma, L.M. Ibungoohal Singh and R.K.Jhalajit Singh who wrote on the history of Manipur, made a deliberate attempt to imprint an Aryan and Hindu origin and identity on the Hinduized Meiteis.<sup>13</sup> Manipur history was given a Sanskritic orientation. These scholars tried to make Manipur culturally a part of India since the early period. They believed that the sources of the history of Manipur were the Vedic literature. The most remarkable claim of Aryan origin for the Meiteis can be seen from the numerous writings of Pandit Atombabu Sharma. Atombabu Sharma wrote more than one hundred papers and books. His *Meitei and Meitei Leipak* and *Manipur Sanatan Dharma* deal with the Vedic interpretation of the origin and history of Manipur. According to him, the Meiteis are

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<sup>13</sup>Sharma, Atombapu. *Meitei and Meitei Leipak*. Bhagyavati Karyalaya Chudaghand P.G. Work, Imphal. No Date;  
Singh, Ibungohal, *An Introduction of Manipur*, Imphal Press, Imphal, 1963,

none other than the Mithis who migrated to this land at a time when Hinduism did not assume its present form. Further, according to him, “The Meteis are the aboriginal Manipuri Kshatriyas.”<sup>14</sup> This interpretation of Vedic antecedents to Manipur was followed by Ibungohal Singh in his *Introduction To Manipur* written in 1960 and R.K Jhalajit Singh in his *A Short history of Manipur* in 1965.

Jyotirmoy Roy in his *History of Manipur* (1958)<sup>15</sup> tried to put forth a systematic history by primarily focusing on the political history of Manipur during the nineteenth century. Her discussions on the pre-colonial periods are very scanty. Her study is mainly based on some colonial writings and other secondary sources.

Since the 1980s there was a great change in historical studies in Manipur. Jawaharlal Nehru University Centre and now Manipur University was established on June 5, 1980. Since then studies in history began to move to a more scientific historical study. A new trend of historical studies was developed, which tried to reassess or interpret the history of Manipur. In 1980, M Kirti attempted to trace the development of Hinduism and its influences on Manipur culture in his book titled *Religious Development in Manipur in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century*.<sup>16</sup> According to Kirti, the process of Hinduism had started from the 8<sup>th</sup> century and it became popular during Kyamba’s reign in the 15<sup>th</sup> century before Hinduism finally became a state religion under Garibniwas in early 18<sup>th</sup> century. He also wrote about the contribution of immigrant Brahmans in the spread of Hinduism in Manipur. This understanding clearly contradicted the writings of earlier authors who sought to date the practice of ‘Hinduism’ in Manipur to Vedic times.

In the same year Saroj Nalini Paratt also made another important contribution to the study of religion in Manipur. Her *The Religion of Manipur*<sup>17</sup> is both a historical and an anthropological study. She used the royal chronicle of Manipur *Cheitharol Kumbaba* as the basis of her research and combined it with the evidence drawn from a few *puyas*. She discussed the traditional beliefs and the various *lais* or deities of the Meitei pantheon

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<sup>14</sup>Atombapu Sharma. *Meitei and Meitei Leipak*. Bhagyavati Karyalaya Chudaghand P.G. Work, Imphal.No Date.p.1.

<sup>15</sup>Roy, Jyotirmoy, *History of Manipur*, K.L Mukhopadyay, Calcutta, 1958

<sup>16</sup> M Kirti, *Religious Development in Manipur in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, Manipur State Kala Academy, Imphal,1980.

<sup>17</sup> Parratt, Saroj Nalini. *The Religion of Manipur: Beliefs, Rituals and Historical Development*. Firma KLM. Calcutta.1980.

along with the myths and legends about them. She pointed out the specificities in the religious observances of the Hindu Meiteis which is peculiar to Manipur. She discussed the historical development of Hinduism in Manipur. She argued that although migration of Brahmans to Manipur started from 15<sup>th</sup> century, Vaishnavism developed in Manipur in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and a synthesis between the old and the new faith was achieved in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century with the identification of the traditional deities with the Hindu ones. According to Parratt, the theory of Aryan origin upheld by Atombapu had no evidence. She argued that Vaishnavism began to appear in Manipur only around 1700. She further says,

“These writers (Atombapu, Ibungohal, Jhalajit and Yumjao) were fundamentally apologists for the integration of Manipur into the Indian mainstream. They were, by and large, Congress supporters who reinterpreted early Manipuri history to support their contention that the state had always shared in the culture of the Indian subcontinent”.<sup>18</sup>

Gangumei Kabui's work appeared in 1991, titled *History of Manipur, Vol. I*, which has made creative use of oral myths and has attempted to reconstruct the history of Manipur from the earliest times till the end of the eighteenth century. He has used a wide range of literary texts, especially the royal chronicle *Cheitharol Kumbaba* and available archeological texts and colonial writings. He discussed the prevailing social and economic organizations of the Meiteis before the advent of Hinduism. He discarded the earlier Manipuri historian's views regarding the Aryan origin for the Meiteis. According to him, Brahmans had migrated to Manipur before Garibniwas' period, but it was during Garibniwas' reign that Brahmans were employed in the Meitei court and the idea that Meiteis were of Aryan origin were of Aryan origin was planted then<sup>19</sup> He tried to analyze the evolution and expansion of the Meitei state. According to him, the making of the Meitei state was fulfilled during the time of Kyamba.<sup>20</sup> However he missed out the

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<sup>18</sup> Parratt, SarojNalini. *The Court Chronicle Of The Kings Of Manipur: The CheitharolKumpapa*. 1  
Routledge, New York.2005.p.2

<sup>19</sup> Kabui.op.cit.p.57

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.p.38

important element of Meitei state formation, which was achieved after the advent of Hinduism.

There is agreement, however, amongst both the earlier scholars and the later scholars of Manipur history that the Meiteis were formed with the political consolidation of different *salais or yeks* ('clans' or 'tribes'), namely, Luwang, Angom, Magang, Khaba, Nganba, Chenglei, Khumans and Moirang. However, Gangumei Kabui extended the knowledge of each clan's history and genealogy. He said that the Meitei society was a casteless society, and with the conversion to Vaishnavism, all the Meiteis, including the king, were declared as Kshatriyas. He also argued that it was because of this conversion that the gap grew between the hill people who did not convert into the Hindu fold and the Meiteis, who accepted the new faith and thus formed a separate and distinct social group.

Wangkhemcha Chingtamlen also followed this idea and said that the advent of Hinduism since the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the sole, disintegrating factor between the hills and the plains. His book *A Short History of Kangleipak (Manipur)*<sup>21</sup> published in 2005 was an attempt to reconstruct the early history of Manipur. He opposed the theory of Atombapu. He also argued that the Meiteis were the descendants of the hill people. He used colonial accounts, archeological reports, and as well as the *puya* called *Wakoklon Heelex Thile lSalai Amailon Pukok Puyane Lepna Knanpio*, which had been never used earlier by any historian. Though his interpretation is quite different and controversial, the importance of his book lies in its presentation of the various traditions of Manipur through the newly found *puya*.

### **(b) Colonial Writings**

From the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the European states increasingly extended their power through the gradual creation of official documents like that of gazetteers, statistical accounts etc. to form the basis of their capacity to govern.<sup>22</sup> Cohn said that,

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<sup>21</sup> Wangkhemcha Chingtamlen, *A Short History of Kangleipak (Manipur)*. K.K Printings Imphal.2005

<sup>22</sup> Bernard S. Cohn. *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1996.p.p.3-16.

“To the educated Englishman of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century the world was knowable in an empirical fashion through the sense, which could record the experience of a natural world”.<sup>23</sup>

Commenting on the British Empire’s obsession with paper work, Thomas Richard said “In a very real sense there’s was a paper empire: an empire built on a series of flimsy pretexts that were always becoming text.”<sup>24</sup> According to him, the empire was united not by force, but by information. The colonial writings in the North East Frontier and Manipur follow the colonial tradition of the survey modality, which includes the form of exploration of the natural and social landscape. R.B. Pemberton in his book *The Report on the Northeast frontier of British India*<sup>25</sup> published in 1835 said that due to a lack of information regarding the area, the British East India Company soldier did not have even a slightest advantage during the early period of First Anglo-Burmese war.<sup>26</sup> Realizing the problem, the British officers who had been posting in the eastern frontier were given orders to collect information on eastern frontier.<sup>27</sup> Pemberton popularized the concept of regionalism. Pemberton’s highest priority was geographical information including topography, land routes, mountain chains and passes, rivers etc., of the region.

The British adopted a regional approach to the North Eastern Frontier of British India, right before the first Anglo-Burmese war in 1824. The term, North East Frontier was broadly used as a geographical expression to cover a huge tract of land. In 1816 the East India Company appointed an Agent to the Governor General for the North Eastern Frontier. Alexander Meckenzie, in his *History of the Relations of the Government with The Hill Tribes of North Eastern Frontier of British Bengal*, remarked that the term North East Frontier was used to denote a boundary line and sometimes more generally to describe a tract.<sup>28</sup> Such colonial writings dealt with a portion of Manipuri history but a

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Richard. *The Imperial Archives: Knowledge and Fantasy of Empire*. Verso Publication. New York.1993.p.81

<sup>25</sup> R.B. Pemberton, *Report on the North Eastern Frontier of the British India*. Baptist Mission Press. Calcutta.1835

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.p.2.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Alexander Mackenzie.*History of the Relations of the Government with The Hill Tribes of North Eastern Frontier of British Bengal*. Mittal Publication. New Delhi.2005.p.1.



history of the kingdom, as such was not seriously attempted. It was more of an administrative report, responding to British needs, to be able to firmly locate and identify the local people for a better governance of the place.

W. McCulloch's "*Accounts of the Valley of Munnipore and surrounding Hill Tribes*" was published in 1859 at Calcutta. McCulloch was in Manipur for nearly 23 years from 1844-1867. Similarly, R. Brown, as a young officer, volunteered to accompany Ghambeer Singh in the liberation of Manipur. He collected the facts and figures about the economic, cultural, religious, political and social life of the Manipuri people and published a *Statistical Account of Manipur* in 1874. He gives us details of the treaty of 1834 between the Manipur Government and the British government. According to him, the objective of the establishment of the political agency was to preserve friendly relations with the Manipur government in order to prevent border feuds and disturbances in the North Eastern Frontier of British India. He also discussed the effect of Revolt of 1857 in Manipur. Brown also recorded the incident of some Manipuri chiefs from Cachar, who made an attempt to overthrow the Manipur government taking advantage of the arrival of news about the Revolt of 1857. One of the prominent figures in the attempted to overthrow in Manipur was Nurendrojit or Chai Ahum who was later imprisoned by the Manipur government.<sup>29</sup> The *Gazetteer of Manipur* compiled by Captain E.W. Dun in 1886 followed Brown's work.

In a very real way, the subject matter of anthropology has been the study of the colonized. If the colonies were to be governed well, then it was natural that information should be systematically collected about the society, caste, religion etc. According to Renate Zahar, the prosperity and privileges of the colonizer are directly based on the exploitation and pauperization of the colonized.<sup>30</sup> However, the impetus to collect information on society went way beyond the administrative purpose and, rather, became the intellectual curiosity of a few officials. Colonial officials who eventually rose in their career almost always began in a rural area where he worked with very few others and often with no other colonial official. T.C Hodson who studied the tribes of Manipur was a classic example. His first work was *The Meitheis* published in 1908. He also wrote many

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<sup>29</sup>R Brown, *Statistical Account of Manipur*. A Mittal Publication. New Delhi.2001.p.69

<sup>30</sup>Sharma, Manorama. *History and History Writing in North East India*. Regency Publication. New Delhi. 1998. p.62.

articles such as *The Native Tribes of Manipur* and *The Religion of Manipur*.<sup>31</sup> His ethnographic monographs give the description of the appearance and geographical distribution of the people, and then goes on to origin and genealogies, then to laws and customs followed by the religious system and folklores and finally to linguistic descriptions. Hodson also demonstrated the various administrative branches that were adopted in every locality and villages until the contemporary period. His works made the Meiteis known to the English speaking anthropological world. He was one of the earliest administrative officers who was appointed in the University of London to teach anthropology.

J. Shakespear also did ethnographic research on the Meiteis in his *Manipur Festival and Rain-Stopping*.<sup>32</sup> Like Hodson, Shakespear also described the laws and customs, and the folklore of the Meiteis. Both of them used a wide range of sources which were written earlier by the colonial writers as well as the literary sources mainly *CheitharolKumbaba*, the royal chronicle of Manipur. They also carried personal interaction with the local people, mainly the priests.

Under the British government of Manipur Y.Yumjao emerged as an amateur archeologist. His *Report on the Archeological Studies* 1935 is a landmark in the historical studies in Manipur. His discovery of coins and the controversial Phayeng Plates added a new dimension to the history of Manipur.

There were also memoirs base on their personal experiences such as *My Experience in Manipur and Naga Hills* written by Sir James Johnstone published posthumously in 1896 in London. Another memoir, which gives a short sketch of Manipur history is *My Three Years Experience in Manipur* (1899) by St. Clair Grimwood who was the wife of Frank Grimwood, the ill-fated political agent during the close of the 1880s. Within the Meitei society, the freedom of women became a part of the colonial narratives. They were fascinated by the fact that Manipuri women had been very independent and influential both, socially and economically. Colonial writings regarding Meitei women compared them with the women from the rest of the Indian subcontinent.

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<sup>31</sup>T.C Hodson, *The Native Tribes of Manipur* in *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland Vol 31* (Jan-Jun.,1901)

\_\_\_\_\_ *The Religion of Manipur* in *Folklore Vol.24, No. 4* (Dec., 1913)

<sup>32</sup> J. Shakespear, *Manipur Festival* in *Folklore, Vol. 2, No. 1* (Mar., 1910)

\_\_\_\_\_ *Rain-Stopping in Manipur* in *Folklore, Vol. 22, No. 22* (Sep. 30, 1911).

According to Dun, “Meitei women are... the mainstay of the family circle.” Grimwood also praised the Meitei woman by saying that “Manipuris do not shut up their women, as is the custom in most part of India and they are much more enlightened and intelligent in consequence.”<sup>33</sup> Then finally, according to Brown, “it would be very difficult to find a more industrious woman in India than the Manipuris”.<sup>34</sup>

Colonial writers also focused on the *Lallup*, a Meitei form of political organization. The *British abolished the Lallup* in 1891, after Manipur was brought under the British Empire. It was a system wherein all adult males were required to serve the king for 10 days in every 40 days. *Lallup* covered all the state works, both military and developmental maintenance. Johnstone, Grimwood, followed by Hodson had all praised the system of *lallup* in Manipur. According to them, it was through the *lallup* system that the country (Manipur) had developed economically and had become a strong military power.

Colonial writers also concentrated in finding the origins of the Meiteis. We have seen that in the early writings, the Meitei historians had deliberately attempted to imprint an Aryan and Hindu origin on the identity of the Meiteis. Colonial writers, on the other hand, did not accept the Aryan origin of the Meiteis. The question of the racial and ethnic identity was raised, and it became one of the major aspects for colonial writers. Brown recognized that Hinduism in Manipur was of a comparatively recent introduction. He declined the idea of ‘revival’ of Hinduism in Manipur and the belief that *Meiteis* were descendants of Arjuna (the hero of the epic *Mahabharata*). According to Hodson, Hinduism is of comparatively recent origin in Manipur and Hinduism existed in Manipur only in an exoteric form. He traced its development from Garibniwas’s period in the first half of the eighteenth century. He says,

“To the outward observer they seem to have adopted only the festivals, the outward rituals, the caste marks and the exclusiveness of the Hinduism while unmindful of its spirit and inward essentials”.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Mrs. Grimwood. *My three years Experience in Manipur*. Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2008.p.45.

<sup>34</sup> Op.cit Brown. p.76.

<sup>35</sup> T.C.Hodson, *The Meiteis*. Low Prices Publications, Delhi,1999,P.96.

According to McCulloch, the clans of Meiteis were the descendants of the Naga and Kuki tribes.<sup>36</sup> McCulloch said that the Moirang clan was the descendant of the Marring who settled in the south and Luwang clan from Kabui from the north west.<sup>37</sup> G.A. Grierson, in his *Linguistic Survey of India*, said that the ancestors of the Meiteis were from China who migrated to Irrawaddy and Chindwin basin of upper Burma.<sup>38</sup> Grierson placed the Meitei language (*Meiteilon*) in the Tibeto-Burman group of languages.<sup>39</sup> R. Brown did not clearly endorse the theory of Grierson or McCulloch but was firmly against the theory, believed by the Hindu Meiteis of the time, that they were the descendants of Arjun.<sup>40</sup> James Johnstone also says that,

“Meitei is an Indo-Chinese descendant, with some admixture of Aryan blood, derived from the successive wave of Aryan invaders that have passed through the valley in prehistoric days. Then the race has been constantly fed by addition from the various hill tribes surrounding the valley”.<sup>41</sup>

T.C. Hodson was against the theory of Brian Houghton Hodgson that the Meiteis were the descendants from and the Kochin Chinese ‘*Moy*’ and Siamese ‘*Tai*’. Hodson suggested that the theory of Meitei being descended from the Chinese was doubtful. According to him, Meitei had been derived from *mi*, which means ‘man’ and *tei* means ‘separate’ (Hodson did not clearly mention which particular language he was defining Meitei). Hodson inclined toward the theory of Meitei being related to the surrounding hill areas. Hodson suggested, in terms of internal organization, religion, habits, and manners, that there was ultimate homogeneity between the Meiteis of two hundred years ago, with the contemporary hill people. However, Hodson concluded by saying that “the subject of Meitei origin could not be entirely taken by comparative ethnology”.<sup>42</sup> We cannot conclude extensively here that the Meitei clans were descendants from the surrounding

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<sup>36</sup>Op cit Culloch.p.4

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Grierson. G.A. *Linguistic Survey of India Vol.3 Part.3*. Calcutta 1904

<sup>39</sup>Ibid

<sup>40</sup>Op cit Brown.p,57

<sup>41</sup> James Johnstone. *Manipur and The Naga Hills*. Gyan Publishing House. New Delhi.2002.p.98

<sup>42</sup>Op cit. Hodson. *The Meitheis*.pp.10-13

hill tribes, but, we also cannot ignore the element of the incorporation of the hill tribe since the evolution of the Meitei as an ethnic group since there was a process of assimilation of various hill tribes into the Meitei fold.

As we can see from a review of works written on Manipur, very limited work has been done on the state formation of Manipur. Several historians worked on the achievements of the great kings in the history of Manipur. Gangumei Kabui made an attempt in his *History of Manipur: Vol 1: Pre-Colonial Period*, but did nothing beyond noting the contributions and achievements of individual kings.

Thus, one can conclude this section by saying that the history of Manipur written by scholars is either a Hindu oriented story explaining their origins to a Hinduised mythical pastor highlighting the achievements of Hinduised rulers. There is thus a significant gap on the past of Meitei social and political structure before the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the next section, I will examine the sources that are available for tracing the history of Manipur in order to understand the nature of society in the pre-colonial period.

## **1.2 Puyas as sources**

Every society has a historical consciousness, which is not always visible and has to be prised from sources which tends to conceal it.<sup>43</sup> In Meitei tradition too, there existed a body of writings especially devoted to religion, chronology, and history of the Meiteis from which much valuable and authentic information would be derived. These are the *puyas*. *Puyas* have not uniformly found recognition as an important branch of Meitei literature and source of Manipur history. In fact, it was the western scholars who started the early studies of the *puyas*. *Puyas* may be defined as written records handed down from generation to generation among the Meiteis. The writing of the *puyas* was carried out by the palace *maichous* who were the ‘official scribes’ in the *loisang* or ‘institution of scribes’.<sup>44</sup> Dr. Grierson preferred to call these *maichous* a ‘guild’ who presented their works to the Meitei kings who were invariably their patrons.<sup>45</sup> They are the records of

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<sup>43</sup>Thapar, Romila. *History and Beyond*. Oxford university Press, New Delhi, 2010.p. 138

<sup>44</sup>*maichouis* a learned scholar and Priest of Meitei court and *Loisang* literally it means a House. *AmaibaLoisang* thus was a house of intelligentsia.

<sup>45</sup>Grierson.G.A. *Linguistic Survey of India Vol.3 Part.3*. Calcutta1904. p.24

everything that their forefathers were interested in *Puyas* are important in Meitei history because they preserve, in an encyclopedic fashion, every possible aspect of Meitei society and culture. *Puyas* can be divided into ritual songs, hymns, laws and orders, etiquette codes and chronicles that include various clan genealogies. Like the *puranas*, *puyas* also encapsulate features of what might be seen as historical experience by implicating a commentary on social, political and religious images of the Meiteis. However their relevance and status have been questioned mainly because of their content, which are of a mythical nature. Besides, none of the *puyas* are dated and all being anonymous. The guiding principles adopted for the purpose of dating, by scholars are (a) the degree of archaism of the language, (b) comparative antiquity of the theme (c) absence of alien words i.e. Sanskrit and Bengali and finally (d) style of composition.<sup>46</sup>

In each generation myths mediate the cultural heritage in such a way that its new constituents will be adjusted to the old by the process of selection, what continues to be of social relevance is stored, while the rest are usually forgotten.<sup>47</sup> Western tradition tends to view myth and history as concepts that complement each other; they are distinct representations of the course and significance of past events, and they are symptomatic of an eponymous for two alternative modes of thought.<sup>48</sup> They are now considered consecutive stages in the development of human thought. It is believed that the deepest layer of the embedded history form is a myth.<sup>49</sup> The significance of the myth to the historian lies more in its being the self-image of a given culture, expressing its social assumptions. Myth becomes an important source in the development of ideologies, religions, and cultures.<sup>50</sup> Thus history is closely related to myth. History does not need myth in order to survive, however, myth is very valuable in the formation of history because it has filled in the gaps that history has left open. Mythology has bridged the gaps that people have not been able to fill with historical data. When evidence of an event

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<sup>46</sup> Op.cit.Manihar.p.10. and Jhalajit.R.K. p. 2.

<sup>47</sup>(ed)Gody,Jack and Watt,Ian . *The Consequences of Literacy in Literacy in Traditional Societies*. Syndics of the Cambridge University Press. London. 1968.pp.27-69.

<sup>48</sup> Karin R. Andriolo. Myth and History: A General Model and Its Application to the Bible. In *American Anthropologist Vol-83,Issue 2. June.1981*.

<sup>49</sup> Op.cit. Thapar.p.140

<sup>50</sup>F.F. Bruce, Myth & History. In (ed) Colin Brown, *History, Criticism & Faith. Four Exploratory Studies*. Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester.1976.pp.79-99.

is found, the myth is replaced with the discovered fact. Until evidence is found, the myth will stand as a historical perspective.<sup>51</sup> Myth has an aim to legitimize the socio-political structure of the society or else to explain why and how past events happened. The agency of the action is ultimately human even if sometimes claimed to be divinely inspired and it has its causes too. It is generally agreed that all societies require one or more ideology to organize the existing society.<sup>52</sup> Myth fulfills in traditional culture an indispensable function since it stands behind the social order as charter and gives to social institutions an aura of rightness.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the myth is important in dealing with the quest for understanding the significance of culture, and the action of the myth is usually the narration of sacred history, which is believed to be true events that have taken place in the past. Further, myth, in a sense, is a prototype history since it is a selection of ideas composed in narrative form for the purpose of preserving and giving significance to an important aspect of the past.<sup>54</sup> Myths, therefore, have a widely over-arching relationship to all aspects of society, and each major myth could be the subject of an extensive analysis. There are many *puyas* that the Meiteis had preserved, but only few of them has been accounted feasible by many scholars by the scholars from Manipur and by the British officials. Few of the *puyas* that have been used extensively will only be discussed in this paper.

*Cheitharol Kumbaba* and *Ningthaurol Lambuba* are the most popular and widely used *puyas* by historians dealing with the history of Manipur. They are official royal history of the Meiteis. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* was kept under the protection of *Pundit Achouba* (Head Pundit).The official copy of the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* was kept in the Manipur Royal Palace but was overseen by the *Maichou* Ngariyanbam Kulachandra while *Ningthaurol Lambuba* was preserved by the Pundit Shree Heera Singh from Andro in North East Manipur. According to Kulachandra Sharma, the medium used in writing these texts was bark, and the ink was of traditional materials.<sup>55</sup> The bark used was a local

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Chakrabarti, Kunal. *Religious Process: The Puranas and the Making of a Regional Identity*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2001.p.p. 8-11.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Carr, E.H. *What is History?* Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, 1965. p. 105.

<sup>55</sup> Sharma, B Kulachandra, *Typology & Technology of Meitei Writing Materials*. B. Rosan, manuscript Library Imphal.1999.p.67.

tree called agar and the paper was called *Agarbak*. Ink was made by pounding organic substance of floral plants (plants name not mentioned) and adding blackened rice powder, soot, and gum. The pen was made from either quill or bamboo.<sup>56</sup> However, there is a lack of information when these texts were compiled or edited in this modern form of paper and pen. These texts are written in the Meitei script and the language is also in the archaic form of *Meiteilon* (i.e. the language spoken by Meiteis). These manuscripts do not reveal the name of the author and are undated. These chronicles give a genealogy of kings of the Ningthouja dynasty from Nongdalairon Pakhangba to Bodhachandra Singh (claimed to be from 33 AD -1955 AD).

According to Parratt, in 1925, during the reign of Churachand (1907 AD-1941 AD), one of the royal scribes Thongam Madhab was commissioned to make a translation of *Cheitharol Kumbaba* into the Bengali script.<sup>57</sup> Pandit N. Khelchandra Singh edited and translated *Cheitharol Kumbaba* to colloquial Meiteilon from archaic Meitei script.

*Cheitharol Kumbaba* can thus be seen to be an official royal history. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* is a compound of two words –*Cheitharol* and *kumbaba*; *Cheitharol* comes from *cheithaba* which is a system of counting years of the Meitei calendar under the lunar system. The year of the calendar was named after an individual who volunteered to be a scape-goat for the evils of the king, country and people for a particular year. In return, he was given a reward of one *pari/puree* (hectare) of tax-free land. He was called the *cheithaba* of the year. *Kumbaba* means counting of years (lit. *kum*: year, *paba*: counting). So *Cheitharol Kumbaba* literally means ‘counting of years according to the name of *cheithaba*’. Most of the early sections, the style of writing in the text is prose. The style of language is quite problematic and the sentences do not show continuity with previous sentences. Sentences are often very short, cryptic and enigmatic. Most of the earlier records are written as spoken, rather than in a literary style. However, as the text advances into the 18<sup>th</sup> century it becomes comparatively simple.

*Ningthaurol Lambuba* was also re-written into the Bengali script and also translated into modern Meiteilon two volumes. The first volume was written in the Bengali script (but the language is Meiteilon) by O. Bhogeshwar in 1967, and the second

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Parratt.op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.3.



volume by Haobam Bilasini Devi in 1994 (written in Bengali script although the language used is Meiteilon). The first volume consisted of the story of the reign of forty-two kings. The records of the text started from the period of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba and ended with the information on Pamheiba. The second volume of the text started with the account of King Mayamba until King Bobhachandra the last reigning king of Manipur. This manuscript does not reveal the name of the author and is also undated. *Ningthouro Lambuba* gives an account of the military expedition of the kings and also the explanation of the origin of the place names. The name of a place was given after the incident or activities related to the kings. That was the reason why the book was given the name *Ningthourol Lambuba*. The name 'Ningthaurol Lambuba' is the combination of four words; *ningthau* means a 'king', *rol* or *lol* meant 'language', *lam* meant a 'place' while *pubaorbuba* meant 'carrying'. Thus the text "*Ningthaurol Lambuba*" meant the 'king's language for carrying lands'. Gangumei Kamei says that *Ningthourol Lambuba* is more detailed than the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, though without proper chronology. He is also of the view that it shows more traditional chronology of Ningthouja dynasty of Manipur.<sup>58</sup> Further, R.K. Jhalajit also says that the *Ningthourol Lambuba* is vital in writing the cultural history of Manipur since the fragment of interesting legends is recorded in this text which is not available elsewhere.<sup>59</sup>

*Bamon Meihourol* was a text written during the period of King Chandrakirti (1850-1886). The royal chronicle the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* mentioned the composition of this text in 1878. It is one of the important puyas, which gives the information of Brahman settlement in Manipur valley. This text remained unpublished and was written in an archaic form of Meiteilon script. Another similar puya that gives the information about the Brahman immigrations and settlement in Manipur is *Bamon Khunthoklon*. It was also written in an old Meitei script and, it was translated into modern speaking Meiteilon by Yendrebam Munan Singh and published by Yek Salai Press, Imphal. The date of the publication has not been mentioned.

*Garibniwas Charit* and *Bhagyachandra Charit* are the puyas written in the form of a biography of the rulers Garibniwas and Bhagyachandra respectively. *Garibniwas*

<sup>58</sup>Op.cit. Kabui. *History Of Manipur Vol-1*.p.38

<sup>59</sup>R.K.Jhalajit. *A history of Manipuri Literature Vol.1*. Public Book Store. Imphal, Khuyathong Bazar. 1976. p.141.

*Charit* was and composed by Kirtichandra during the period of king Chandrakirti. *Garibniwas Charit* deals with the early life of Garibniwas, particularly his military campaigns against the neighbouring states like Burma, Cachar, and Tripura. The text also describes the topography of the Manipur valley along with the temples and sacred sites located in and around the valley of Manipur. *Bhagyachandra Charit* was composed by Gunenedra in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. *Bhagyachandra Charit* deals particularly with the time when Manipur was occupied by the Burmese (not the Seven years of Devastation 1819-26), and King Bhagyachandra took refuge under the protection of the Assam king. The text contains various myths regarding the divine power of Bhagyanchandra. One of the famous myths is that he captured a wild elephant with the help of Lord Vishnu. He has been cast as a true devotee of Lord Vishnu. Both the texts, *Garibniwas Charit* and *Bhagyanchandra Charit* provide an interesting insight to the process of Hinduisation in Manipur valley. Both the texts were written originally in Bengali and were translated in Meiteilon by L. Mangi Singh and L. Mani Singh.

Another *puya*, which is very important is *Anoirol* (*Anoi*=‘dance’, *rol/lol* = ‘language’) literally thus meaning ‘the language of dance’. It is a manuscript containing a record of songs, verse, and ballads describing the origin of dance, its relation to the Meitei cosmogony and the poetic depiction of dances with cultural metaphors, maxims and ethical codes of the Meitei which shaped the aesthetics of the traditional Meitei community life. The date of the manuscript is controversial though. As Moirangthem Chandra, the editor of *Panthoibi Khongkul*, a manuscript where a portion of *Anoirol* appears, claims it was written in the eighth century. However, this is contentious. As there is a tradition of copying down these manuscripts from one generation to another, in their present form, it cannot be particularly as old as it is claimed. It is very unfortunate that scholars of Meitei mayek (scripts) have not yet turned attention to the dating and authenticity of these manuscripts. However, it can be speculated that the text is written sometime before the advent of Hinduism in Manipur *i.e.*, before the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>(Edt)Yaima Singh, Khumanlambam . *Meitei Jagoi: Anoirol*, Imphal, 1973.

### 1.3 Aspects of the Thesis

History of pre-colonial Manipur, before 1891, can be seen as a series of interconnected social, political and cultural processes that led to state formation. Manipur had come under the influence of the culture of many different ethnic groups who came at various times and contributed to the growth of the state. State is associated with a particular bounded territory over which it exercises a monopoly of coercive authority.<sup>61</sup> Legitimacy implies myths and symbols, which provide a kind of ideological rationalization and justification for this monopoly of coercive authority.<sup>62</sup> The problem with many scholars who worked on the history of Manipur is that they fail to express a much more complex reality in the process of state formation. In short, the picture that actually emerges is a much more complex one than that is ascribed by the historian regarding Manipur as a state before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Very few historians have addressed this question and that too from a perspective that emphasizes the evolution of the Meitei state. N.Vijayalakshmi Brara, for instance, says that the kingdom of Manipur valley was perceived as an enlarged family, where members (clans) had their autonomy and yet were at the same time subsumed under one umbrella term, the Meiteis.<sup>63</sup> No serious research has been made by any scholar regarding the state formation of Manipur. Most works are pointing out the role of great individuals that abound in the history of Manipur or trying to imprint an Aryan origin.

States are not a sudden creation, nor can they be explained by a single causal factor. This perspective suggests that they evolve gradually and in response to changes in the size of population, wealth, and production, and in their degree of political and social stratification. Medieval societies in many parts of the world were organized on the basis of almost autonomous principalities.<sup>64</sup> The people living in these principalities were subjects to be exploited by the king. The state comprised principalities, which the king would bring under his own authority. It is an obvious point, though sparsely appreciated,

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<sup>61</sup>Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* , University of California Press. 1991. p.3

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Brara, N Vijayalakshmi, *Politics, Society and Cosmology in India's North East*. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998. P.59

<sup>64</sup>Hasan,S.Nurul ,*Religion, State, and Society in Medieval India*. Oxford University Press, USA.2008.p.63.

that the system of rule in the valley of Manipur before 19<sup>th</sup> century cannot be equated with the well-transformed state, as the use of the term 'state' immediately implies the existence of a structure of relations of domination and subordination.<sup>65</sup> Without strong, geographically inclusive political centers, ethnicity could provide only a weak, episodic basis for affiliation.<sup>66</sup> The awareness of political unity was there, but the understanding of how far was the subordination of the subjects is still a gap to be filled. There is limited work, which shows these clans had been a proper subject to monarchical forms of lordship. Meitei kingdom, rather than being a structure perfected at a given point of time could be seen as a process, which incorporated and adjusted to the traditions and customs of the different clans or tribes in Manipur and Assamese and Bengalis as well as Muslims who were integrated into the Meitei confederation. There are various dimensions regarding the model of state formation and the state in pre-modern India. My thesis does not intend to solve or raise any controversial issue regarding the study of the state. On the contrary it intends to collect some of the relevant elements, which form the skeletal framework in the process of early state formation in Manipur.

The first chapter is *Kingship and Socio-Political Organization*. The chapter will focus more on the process of the evolution of kingship in Manipur. How the Meitei confederation was formed and how Meitei kings had controlled his subject are the few questions to be discussed in this chapter. Further, we will also see some important features of pre-Hindu Meitei society. The second chapter is entitled *Religion: Before And After the advent of Hinduism*. This chapter will try to highlight some prominent beliefs of the Meiteis before Hinduism became the state religion in Manipur. This chapter will also try to look into some of the ceremonies and rituals of the pre-Hinduized Meiteis. Further this chapter will give insights into the process of Hinduization in Manipur. Some of the important questions I would look into are: Why did the Meiteis choose Hinduism over Buddhism as a state religion? How can Hinduization be seen as a process to legitimize the authority of the Meitei kings and what were the changes brought by the adoption of Hinduism in Manipur? The third chapter is Economic Structure of Manipur before First

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<sup>65</sup> Chattopadhyaya. B. D, *The Making of early Medieval India*. Oxford University Press .Delhi, 1994,p.20

<sup>66</sup> James C Scott, *The Art Of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History Of Upper Southeast Asia*. Yel University Press, U.S. 2009.

Anglo-Burmese War (1824-25). This chapter will focus mainly on the generation of surplus and its distribution in Meitei kingdom before the advent of Anglo-Burmese War. The fourth chapter titled the *British and State Formation of Manipur* will discuss the relationship between the British and Manipur. To be more specific, this chapter will analyze examples of benefits that two parties attained through this mutual political relationship.

Prompted by the short vision of Manipuri historians on Manipur state formation, I have undertaken my research on the chosen topic. It is hoped that my research will provide new elements which other historians have missed out and come useful in constructing the history of pre-colonial Manipur.

## Chapter 2

### **Kingship and Socio-Political Organization**

This chapter will trace the development of the socio-political order that led to the beginnings of state formation in Manipur. Not many scholars have tried to study the underlying processes leading to the emergence of the kingdom of Manipur. Building upon the work of James Scott, I would like to present a line of reasoning that accentuates a set of preconditions or elements, which continuously shaped state development. According to Scott, the concentration of manpower was one such category. The attempt at concentrating manpower in the hands of the ruler was the key to political power in pre-modern Southeast Asia.<sup>1</sup> It was the first principle of statecraft and the source of the history of virtually every pre-colonial kingdom in the region.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, forms of states are to be grasped from the material condition of life, which constitutes the economic structure of the society and its political structure. Regional consolidation, territorial expansion and the extraction of resources from the subjects are the other major elements for the emergence of a state. While the economic structure of pre-colonial Manipur will be discussed in a later chapter of the thesis, this chapter will focus on the strategies the rulers of Manipur employed to assume control and consolidate themselves, which became one of the important bases for the formation of their state.

#### **2.1 Evolution of kingship**

The transition from tribal polities or chiefdoms to statehood did not occur at once in Manipur. It occurred over time and space. According to Suranjit.K.Saha (citing L.H. Morgan), the first and the most ancient plans of government, was the development of the social organization of various tribes and clans.<sup>3</sup> The transformation of primitive and segmentary societies into states was not just completed overnight. It is clear that

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<sup>1</sup> James C. Scott, *The Art Of Not Being Governed: An Anarchy History Of Upland South East Asia*, Yale University Press, London, 2009. p.64

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Saha, Suranjit K, Early State Formation In Tribal Areas of East Central India, in *Economy And Political Weekly*, Vol 31, No 13 , March 30 1996. p. 826

some clans crystallized into rudimentary state formation by the amalgamation of various social groups into one strong entity.

For instance, the process of early state formation of Koch kingdom was started under the leadership of Haria Mech.<sup>4</sup> Haria started the process of unifying various clans and subsequently brought them within a fold of Koch socio-political organization. It is believed that the process of state formation of the Koches was reinforced by Naranarayan in the first half of 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Birpal alias Gayapal (early 12<sup>th</sup> century) has been considered as the founder of the Chutiya ruling house. According to Nath, Birpal was a legendary hero of a small community which consists of only sixty families on the hill called Sonagari. Birpal started the process of unifying various tribes under a Chutiya socio-political fold. However it was under his son Gaurinayan alias Ratnadhvajpal (1146-12246) who took control over or unified all the other section of clans or tribes in Rangalugiri, Kalagiri, Niligini, Dhavalgiri, Chandangiri and formed the Chutiya Kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley.

A similar story can be seen in the case of Manipur, which however has to be gleaned from fragmentary evidence. Prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, very little evidence is available regarding the history of Manipur. This history, before Kyamba (1467-1508), is mainly based on chronicles, legend and myths that were put down in writing for the first time, possibly around the 16<sup>th</sup> century. While the chronicles also use chronology and date events, these dates cannot actually be verified, nor can the matter in it be ascertained. However, it is also important to use these chronicles as they do present a social reality from which we can draw conclusions.

From the evidence available, the Meitei society was a kingship and lineage based society. The word 'Meitei' originally referred to only the people who belonged to the clan of the founding dynasty of the Ningthaujas, but later on came to incorporate all the seven ethnic groups mentioned above.<sup>6</sup> *Ningthauja* was derived from *Ningthau*, which literally means 'king', while *cha* means 'child'. The term *Ningthauja* was said to be recorded for the first time during the reign of Sameirang

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<sup>4</sup> Rahaman, Md Shah Noorur, The Emergence of the Koch State in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, in *Early States in North East India* (edt) J B Bhattacharjee and D R Syiemlieh, Regency Publication And Astral International Pvt Ltd. New Delhi. 2013. pp.50-58

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Parrat.op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.18 and Manikchand.op.cit.p.157.

(518 CE) while the term Meitei was said to have been used for the people for the first time during the reign of Konthauba (568 CE).<sup>7</sup>

An important feature of the social structure of the Meiteis was the institution of a system of *Salai* ('clan'). Each *salai* was subdivided into smaller units called *sagei* ('sub-clan'). The Meiteis used two terms of significance rather frequently in their social introduction among themselves: *yek*, the name of the *salai* and *yumnak*, the name of the *sagei*. The head or *piba* of each clan was designated as the *ningthou*, or 'chief of the clan'.

If one were to re-construct the history of Manipur based on these chronicles, they refer to thirty-three rulers before Kyamba. Many clans are mentioned in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* and *Ningthaurol Lambuba* especially where there are references to inter-tribal conflicts. The names of clans like Ningthauja, Angom, Khuman, Luwang, Khaba, Moirang, Mangang were recorded in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. Besides these, there existed several other tribes, such as Mangding, Chiren, Khende, Heiren, Khunju etc, all of whom, in the course of time, might have merged into one or the other of seven acknowledged principalities or clans. Gangumei Kabui had acknowledged the presence of seven clans when he observed that historical evidence indicate the existence of various ethnic groups and lineages in the valley of Manipur.<sup>8</sup> Hodson observed that there were ten clans before they were merged to seven clans. He explained by quoting the traditional ballad "*Numit kappa*" or 'the man who shot the sun', where mention is made of the ten kings in the valley. The ten kings were the heads of the ten clans. It is accepted by various Manipur Historians that the Meiteis was formed by the amalgamation of seven major clans even though there was the possibility of more than seven clans.<sup>9</sup>

It is generally agreed by contemporary scholars that these seven clans mentioned above were originally an ethnic group or tribe, speaking a distinct language or dialect, having an autonomous principality/territory under a ruler who was both, a political chieftain and social head of the clan. These groups, belonging to the Tibeto-Burman, Tai and other Mongoloids groups might have first been brought gradually under the political suzerainty of leading clans and later into the Ningthauja

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<sup>7</sup> Parratt. Op cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.17

<sup>8</sup> Kabui, Gangumei. *History of Manipur Vol. 1, Pre-colonial Period*, National Publishing House, New Delhi.1991,p.45

<sup>9</sup> Hodson. op cit *The Meitheisp*.24



clan, which was the ruling dynasty at the time of the British arrival. Although the period before Kyamba (1465-1508), not only acknowledged the presence of numerous clans and territorial units, it is difficult to ascertain precisely the territorial boundaries of these *salais*. However, an attempt was made by Konsham Manikchand to give the broad boundaries of these *salais*. He is of the view that the western part of the present Imphal was the original principality of the Ningthauja, and their capital was at Kangla. The principalities of the Angom were to the northeast of the Ningthaujas and their capital was at Pureiromba. The Khuman principality was to the south of the Ningthauja and their capital was at Thoubal. The Moirang principality lay to the southwest of the *Ningthauja* and west of the *Khuman*, and their capital was at Moirang. The *Luwang* principality lay to the north and north-west of the *Ningthaujas*. Their original capital was at Lamphel, which was shifted to Loiching or Makubi Chingng. The *Chengleis* were to the southeast of the *Ningthaujas*, with their capital at Takna.<sup>10</sup> However, Konsham Manikchand's mapping of the given clan territory has not been yet investigated or verified by any other scholar. It appears that Manikchand's division of territory was not based on any kind of evidence based historical research and merely assumptions

It is not clear when the seven clans were assimilated properly into the Meitei. The Cheitharol Kumbaba refers to the Ningthaujas as having consolidated themselves under the charismatic leadership of Pakhangba who is dated to 33 C.E. This was considered to be the beginning of the adoption of the new ethnic identity known as the *Meitei*. The campaign for the consolidation of various clans in the valley was thus attributed to Pakhangba. It has been accepted by several scholars, with the help of oral and royal chronicles of Manipur that Pakhangba was the first historical king of the *Meiteis* and the one who established Kangla as a capital of Meitei kingdom, although the dating is suspect. Manipur historians like Atombapu believed that the subjugation of seven clans was completed by Pakhangba. According to Gangumei, Pakhangba had subjugated Angom, Khuman, Luwang and Mangang clans. Gagumei also believed that the process of assimilation of seven clans was completed during the reign of Kyamba.<sup>11</sup> However, according to the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* and *Bhagyachandra Charitra*, there were battles fought between the Meiteis and the Moirang clan until the

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<sup>10</sup> Konsham Manikchand, Evolution of the Meitei State, in *Manipur Past And Present: The Heritage and Ordeals Of a Civilization*, (edt) Naorem Sanajaoba, Mittal Publication, Delhi, 1998. p.151

<sup>11</sup> Kabui. op cit. *History of Manipur Vol-1*.p.87

early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was only after the First Anglo-Burmese War (1826) that the ruler Ghambir consolidated the Moirangs and the Meiteis became more powerful in Manipur. That is why the advent of First Anglo-Burmese War became an important event or landmark in the history of Manipur.

In sum, thus, the seven principalities (or even tribes) can be said to have undergone an age long struggle amongst themselves till the *Meiteis* or the Ningthoujas finally established supremacy over the rest and absorbed the others, one by one, over a period that covered several centuries. The conflict and war of the *Meiteis* with different *salais* are frequently recorded in the royal chronicles until the time of Kyamba.<sup>12</sup> For example, during Sameirang (518 CE), it is mentioned in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* that,

“There was a battle with the Angoms. In the battle Kwapka Thawanthapa the chief of the Angom was killed and the land of Angoms became a tributary.”<sup>13</sup>

These frequent wars among the *salais* can be seen as the process of political legitimization in the region, even as Skaria has noted that, wars or raids were often the part of the construction of larger centralized states.<sup>14</sup>

From the available sources, it is clear that there was strong resistance from the Moirang kingdom against the authority of the Ningthaujas in the valley, until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Gangumei believed that Khaba (another salai) fought strongly against the Ningthauja campaign to control the valley. Besides, Khaba was also said to have conquered Kangla (capital of Meitei kingdom) for a very short period.<sup>15</sup> However, neither oral sources nor the chronicles support the idea of Khaba conquering Kangla even for short period in the early Manipur history. Among the clans, Moirang was the last one to join the *Meitei* Confederacy. The Moirangs challenged the sovereignty of the Meitei kingdom consistently, from time to time. Frequent incidence of the battles between the Moirangs and the Meiteis are recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. According to the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* ,

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<sup>12</sup> Parratt, Saroj Nalini Arambam, *The Court Chronicle of the kings of Manipur: The Cheitharol Kumpapa*. Vol -1, Routledge, New York.2005.p.p.27, 28,29,31,34, 56

<sup>13</sup>ibid.p.25

<sup>14</sup> Skaria, Ajay. *Hybrid History: Forest Frontier and Wildness in Western India*. Oxford University Press, New York.1999.pp.1-20

<sup>15</sup> Kabui. Op.cit. *History of Manipur Vol-1*.p.146

“Moirangs, led by sixty-three brave warriors, attacked the Meiteis. The Meiteis were victorious and all the Moirangs were killed by the Meiteis. Khongtekcha (763 CE) reigned for ten years. There was no king for eleven years after him”.<sup>16</sup>

*Cheitharol Kumbaba* does not give any reason why there was no king for eleven years after Khongtekcha (763 CE). It is hard to conclude from this fact that there was peace in the valley or that the Ningthaujas had total control over the valley at the time. This fact challenges the general idea held by Manipuri historians that the consolidation of *salais* was completed under the leadership of Pakhangba. Meiteis conquered Moirang again under the leadership of Ningthoukhompa (1432-1467 CE).<sup>17</sup> Though the Moirangs suffered defeat and humiliation frequently in the hands of the Meiteis, they were able to withhold their sovereignty until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moirangs, with the help of Burmese dethroned the Ningthaujas on more than one occasion during the period of Chingthangkomba/Bhagyachandra (1764-79 CE). The *Bhagyachandra Charitra* gives details regarding the battle between the Moirangs and the Meiteis during the period of Bhagyanchandra. Hodson even commented that the Moirang tribes preserved a very fair amount of independence up to the advent of British authority in Manipur.<sup>18</sup> However, the Moirang seem to have been finally subdued after the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824). Manipur, just before the advent of the First Anglo-Burmese War, was conquered and devastated by the Burmese for a few years. The event of Burmese conquering Manipur is still known as “Seven Years Devastation” among the Meiteis. Under the leadership of Ghambir Singh, with the help of the British, Manipur got freedom and the famous Moirang kingdom was not again mentioned as the separate clan (or any battles between the Moirangs and the Meiteis) neither in any of the chronicles of Manipur nor in any British administrative reports. Thus the seven *salais*/clans who at one point of time independently ruled their well-defined principalities were ultimately amalgamated into a united people called the *Meiteis*.

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<sup>16</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.27

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.p.37

<sup>18</sup> Hodson. op.cit. *The Meitheis*. p. 59

## 2.2 Territorial Sovereignty

The supremacy of the Meitei kings was reflected in military aggrandizement and territorial expansion. The *Cheitharol Kumbaba and Ningthaurol Lambuba* record many incidents of the Meiteis fighting against other clans and the hill people during every king's reign. For instance, it is recorded in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*,

“Meetingu Thanpi Lanthapa became a king. Meitei attacked the *Maring*. *Meitei* were victorious. They captured in battle Maring Manatol, the sword smith, Thingkari who looked like a woman, and many others were captured”.<sup>19</sup>

During the reign of Kyamba, the Meitei kingdom was also said to have extended its territory from the *Kabui* (*Rongmei* tribe) country in the west and to the east till the bank of the Chindwin river in the east after defeating the *Ava* or *Pong* (Burmese). There was an accord signed for the distribution of territories between the Pong and Meitei ruler, which was recorded in *Chietharol Kumbaba*. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* gives the territorial boundary in very clear terms like

“In the North East Mungkhong Mungyang, it was upto Loijiri Hills, in the south up to Miyutong was for the *Meiteis*”.<sup>20</sup>

The same accord was also recorded in a Meitei text (*puya*) called *Pong Meitei Lamyen Lairik*.<sup>21</sup> This shows the recognition of the territory of *Meitei* kingdom by the powerful Burmese kingdom. Further, various Meitei campaigns for territorial expansion towards the hill areas of the Manipur are also recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. For example,

“King Khakemba once again attacked the area of *Thangkhuns* and he was victorious”.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. p.34

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.p.89.

<sup>21</sup> Pong was term used for Burmese by the Meiteis, *Lamyen* means distribution of territory and *Lairik* means Book

<sup>22</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.85

There are also other evidences in the chronicles about the territorial expansion of Meitei rulers. For instance, in 1712 under King Garibniwas (1709-1740) it was mentioned that the *Meiteis* invaded Tokpa and Naongphow, which were Aanal villages. In this expedition, the *Aanals* were said to have put up a great resistance but the *Meiteis* were successful. Nineteen Meitei warriors were killed and the king accorded state funeral to the dead warriors.<sup>23</sup> *Ningthaurol Lambuba* also records that Garibniwas invaded Sachung village and Sachung chief Senkuplen was speared to death by a Meitei nobleman, Mungyang Nahongba and the king himself cut off his head.<sup>24</sup> Thus the evidence shows that the period before the 19<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by a type of relation where the various tribes of Manipur, both in the hills and valleys were either the subjects or allies of the Meitei king. It was mainly the military supremacy of the Meiteis which maintained that relationship. Assembling such potential nodes of power into political and military alliances was itself a small, but effective element of state craft. The process of integrating the Seven *Salais* into a single but larger group or entity can be explained in terms of a political and administrative initiation towards the formation of a state. Here we can see the beginning of the creation of the Meitei kingdom. Two developments thus can be seen to have occurred: firstly, the move from a small homogeneous tribal unit to that of a more multi-cultural unit and secondly, the increased territorial extent of the Meitei kingdom as a result of conquest. Moreover, the creation of a ruling lineage namely the Ningthauja dynasty seems to have completed the political foundation of a state. The Ningthauja rule continued till Manipur joined the Republic of India in 1949.

As the Ningthauja extended their territories, they commonly sought to strengthen their control over the subjects by a system of surplus extraction and coercion. However, it is well known that it is impossible to install an effective sovereignty over people who are always in motion, which was the nature of some of the tribes that the Ningthauja conquered. And it is only an irrigation system, if it functions well, that helps in ensuring the populations itself remain in place. There is no civilization when there is still a lack of an active settled agricultural population. In the next section, we will see how the Meitei kings attempted at settling the moving populations.

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<sup>23</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba Vol-1*.p.130.

<sup>24</sup> Oinam Bhogeshwar Singh. *Ningthourol Lambuba*, vol.1 M.J.Printing Works, Imphal.1967.p

### 2.3 “Concentration of man power”

The idea of “concentration of man power” is based on the idea put forth by James Scott. His idea of “concentration of man power” rested its importance mainly on military consideration and occupation of a fertile plain, which is applicable in case of early Manipur history. Scott argued that,

“In a pre-modern system, only power can guarantee property and wealth. And power, before the technological revolution in warfare, was largely a matter of how many men a ruler could field; power, in other words, boiled down to manpower”.<sup>25</sup>

An exploitation of natural resources requires major population growth with more human labor. It has been perceived by most of the scholars that earlier, the valley of Imphal (the heart of the Meitei kingdom) was swampy with a large number of lakes and marshes, which were required to be drained continuously.<sup>26</sup> The settlement pattern in the valley will be discussed briefly later in a chapter on Manipur economy. Briefly, the water from swampy areas was needed to drain out through three rivers, namely, the Imphal River, the Iri River and the Nambul River. And, in order to drain out the water and perform other state-sponsored activities such as agriculture and making roads, the Meitei king needed a population. Evidence of frequent drainage maintenance is also recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* throughout, until 1947.

The growth of population can be most rapidly increased by encouraging immigration, developing urbanized settlements and the conquest of neighboring groups. In the case of Manipur, it is not clear as to how long the same process took or even whether it was through a prolonged struggle with neighbouring groups or even without much struggle. Our evidence, however, points to the fact that it however did take place.

The historical evidence demonstrates that the *Meiteis* had always provided a broad socio-political framework for integration and frequent assimilation of tribes into the Meitei fold. A considerable number of people from the east and the west of the

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<sup>25</sup> Scott. op.cit.p.68

<sup>26</sup> Kabui, Gangumei. Evolution of State, in (edt)JB Bhattacharjee’s *State and Economy in Pre-colonial Manipur*, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi,2010,p12.

country were absorbed into the Meitei fold. At various stages of their history, a number of people came and settled in Manipur either as war captives or peaceful immigrants. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* keeps the account of men captured from the war and the number of immigrants who came from the neighbouring countries and settled in Manipur. For instance, it is recorded in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*:

“Meetingu Loitongpa became king. He fought in eastern location and won the battle. Captured ten people in battle including Keke Naokhongton, Tolnu Naokhongcha, Aaton Naothingpa, Kokmarong Hinopa and others”.<sup>27</sup>

As the chronicle continues, there are frequent entries of a number of war captives along with the names of some who were captured. In most cases of battles, the royal chronicles emphasize the number of war captives than the number of enemies killed. *Khakemba Lanpha*, a *puya* supposed to be written during Khakemba's reign (1597-1652) for instance, gives us an account of war captives that were captured during his reign. It shows the importance of the recourse of war captives to perform state sponsored activities like draining of canals, irrigation works, and road making. Scott believed that war captives were very prominent and important in a small agrarian state, which relied mostly on agricultural production rather than on the profit of trade and commerce.<sup>28</sup>

The influx of people from the east of Manipur seems to have started much earlier than the migration from the west of Manipur. The relation between the Burmese kingdom, known to the Meiteis as Ava, and the Meitei kings was always in the state of flux through most of known history. Gangumei Kabui is of the opinion that there was a migration of Shans from Burma into Manipur valley and they were absorbed into the Meitei fold while being employed in the services of the state either in the army or civil administration.<sup>29</sup> However, Gangumei failed to give evidence for his hypothesis. The records regarding the people who came from the east and west are however given in the *puyas*. Such migrants from the east were called *Nongpok Haram* while those from the west were called *Nongchup Haram*. According to Konsham

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<sup>27</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p. 30

<sup>28</sup> Scott.op.cit.p.67

<sup>29</sup> Kabui. op.cit. *History of Manipur*.p.211.

Manikchand the descendants of these people from the east and west are still known as *Nongpok Haram* and *Nongchup Haram*.<sup>30</sup>

It was during the reign of Kyamba (1467-1508) that immigrants, especially Brahmins were provided shelter, although the origin of those Brahmins was not known. Further, during the period of Chalampa (1545-1562), for the first time, the term, *Pagan* (referring to Muslims) was used. Sakabda 1467 (Sakabda era is the dating system in *Cheitharol Kumbaba*)<sup>31</sup> was given the name of *Cheithapa*, *Thingpaicham Pagan* there by even giving reference to a Muslim. The allocation of the surname *Thingpaicham* also indicates that the person had been integrated into Meitei society.<sup>32</sup>

All such movements and migrations indicate the slow increase as well as assimilation of populations into Meitei society. It is quite obvious from the *Cheitharol Kumbaba and Ningthaurol Lambuba* that the Brahmins and Muslims who came were given Meitei surnames and they became a part of Meitei society. According to Salam Irene, the immigration of Muslim community in the country increased after 1606 and they were mostly soldiers.<sup>33</sup> According to the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, during Khakemba's reign, the Meiteis captured 30 elephants, 1,000 *Pangans* (Pagans), including several sword smiths and washer men. The captured *Pangans* were allowed to settle and establish their own institutions.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, neither the name of the place nor name of the institutions was given. During Garibniwas' reign, it is recorded that 20 Tekhaos (Meiteis called Assamese Tekhao) were allowed to settle in *Thongtu*.<sup>35</sup>

From the available sources, it is visible that majority of the immigrants who settled in Manipur were Brahmins and Muslims. One of the main questions which are still not yet answered is, what would have been the reason for the immigration of Brahmins and Muslims from the neighbouring countries to Manipur? It is hard to

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<sup>30</sup> Manikchand.Op.cit.p.157.

<sup>31</sup>No serious comparative dating of Sakabda Era and Common Era has been carried till now and also it is difficult to assign perfectly on Common Era since the Meitei Calendar is base on lunar motion while the other is on sun. The only possible way to assign the Sakabda Era in Common Era is to compare the year of some events which are recorded both in the C.K and colonial writings. The account of killing five British officers is recorded in C.K on the year 1812 Sakabda and according to colonial writing the event was happened on 1891. The mutual understanding is that the beginning of Sakabda Era is 78 C.E. So the given date of Sak in the C.K has to be traced by adding seventy eight years to assign the C.E.

<sup>32</sup> Sakabda 1525 was given Year of Namran Kapo. It also shows a person from Kapo (Burmese) who had given Meitei surname. Parratt. op.cit.*Cheitharol Kumbaba*. p.66

<sup>33</sup> Salam Irene, *The Muslims Of Manipur*, Kalpaz Publication, New Delhi. 2010.p .31

<sup>34</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.67

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.p.123



push any factors since there is no primary source that records the issue. However certain historian has suggested a few possibilities regarding the topic. Kunj Behari suggested that the Brahmins came to Manipur in order to escape the wrath of the Muslim rulers in Bengal and Assam.<sup>36</sup> According to Gangumei kabui, it was kyamba's stable and powerful kingdom that attracted people of the neighbouring countries.<sup>37</sup> Another possibility was suggested by Puspa Niyogi that it was the gift of land to the brahmin by the Meitei kings that attracted the Brahmins.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, no scholar has given any suggestions regarding the Muslim immigrants. Regarding the wave of Muslims in Northeast India, S N Bhattacharyya has extensively discussed the Mughal's policy towards North East India in his book entitled *A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy*.<sup>39</sup> He suggested (by citing from Tabakat-i-nasiri) that the relationship with Muhammadans and Kamarupa (part of Assam) began in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and was definitely hostile. According to him,

“The relation of Mughal India with the Mongoloid state on its North-eastern border which began only with the conquest of Bengal by Akbar at the beginning of the last quarter of the sixteen century, gradually waxed into great prominence during the reign of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, and reached its climacteric in the early years of Aurangzeb's rule and waned into insignificance and obscurity during the last quarter of the seventeen century”.<sup>40</sup>

He concluded by saying that Mughal could only occupy Koch Bihar in this century long campaign. Considering the fact that there were intense waves of Mughal in Assam and Bengal in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, it is possible that brahmins from Assam and Bengal might have preferred somewhere far from Mughal influence. However, the suggestion given by Niyogi seems little possibility because no sources has given any incidence of grant of land to the brahmins by the Meitei kings before Hinduism became state religion in Manipur.

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<sup>36</sup> Singh, Kunj Bihari, Manipur Vaishnavism: Sociological Interpretation, in *Sociological Bulletin Vol-12.No-2*, 1963.p.62

<sup>37</sup> .Kabui. op.cit. *History of Manipur vol-2*.p.199

<sup>38</sup> Puspa Niyogi, *Brahmanic Settlement in Different Subdivisions of Ancient Bengal*. Calcutta. 1967.p.4

<sup>39</sup> Bhattacharyya, Sudhindra Nath. *A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy*. Chatterjee, Chatterjee & Co. Ltd. Calcutta.1929.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.p.389.

Those immigrants who wanted to become a part of Meitei society were married to Meitei women. The liberal practice regarding matrimonial alliances, which the Meiteis practiced, forging alliances outside the limits of their own respective exogamous clans helped the assimilation process. For instance, it is recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, “During King Khakemba, Jogi has arrived. A maiden from Chakpa area was arranged to be married to the Jogi”.<sup>41</sup> This implies that the migrant Hindu priests were married to local women. Salam Irene also stated that the Muslims were given Meitei women to wed and were assigned various economic occupations. Muslims were also given local surnames and thus became an indispensable part of Meitei society.<sup>42</sup>

Meitei kings were always concerned about the population of their kingdom. It was said that after the ‘Seven Years of Devastation’, the population of Manipur decreased considerably to roughly 2000 inhabitants only.<sup>43</sup> Ghambir Singh then became occupied in settling the country, inducing fugitive Manipur is to return and generally regain and extend Meitei influence over the surrounding hill tribes. At the time of his death, the population of the valley had increased to about forty thousand.<sup>44</sup>

#### **2.4 Lallup: a feudal system**

Feudalism has often been characterized by historians as a type of society as well as a stage in socio - economic and political development. It is considered both, a type and a stage of society. Historically, feudalism as a social and political system originated in Europe in the Middle Ages. It was basically a system of land tenure with rights and privileges attached to it. Under the feudal land tenure, the land belonged to the king. The monarch gave land grants to social and political classes namely, the nobility, clergy, knights, and peasantry including the serfs. There was the social and political predominance of the land holding aristocracy and the resultant exploitation of the small and weak by the powerful. To Marc Bloch, European feudalism consisted of

“A subject peasantry; widespread use of the service tenement (i.e., the fief) instead of a salary, which was out of the question; the supremacy of a class of specialized warriors; ties of obedience and protection which bind man to man

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<sup>41</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.74

<sup>42</sup> Salam Irene.op.cit.p.27

<sup>43</sup> Culloch. op cit.p.45

<sup>44</sup> Brown. op.cit.p.65

and, within the warrior class, assume the distinctive form called vassalage; fragmentation of authority – inevitably leading to disorder; and, in the midst of all this, the survival of other forms of association, family and State, of which the latter, in the second feudal age(after the twelfth century), was to acquire renewed strength – such then seem to be the fundamental features of European feudalism”.<sup>45</sup>

Feudalism is essentially an European system. However, it has been found that institutions similar to it existed among non-European societies. These are often isolated phenomena in different frameworks or without any relation to the original feudal system. One of the most important topics in Indian history has been the debate on Indian feudalism.

Among the earlier historians who made investigations on Indian feudalism was D.D. Kosambi who devoted his research to the existence of feudalism in Indian history. In his *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, he propounded the concept of feudalism from above and feudalism from below and a comparison of Indian and European systems.<sup>46</sup> It was however R.S. Sharma, who made a full-scale study of the subject in his *Indian Feudalism*. However, there were scholars who strongly felt that feudalism did not exist in India.

In the case of Manipur, the concept put forth by Kosambi seems to hold true. According to Kosambi, feudalism from above means a state where an emperor or a powerful king levied tribute on the subordinates who still in their own right did what they liked within their own territories as long as they paid the paramount ruler.<sup>47</sup>

The revenue and taxation system of Manipur was based on contributing in kind, whether grain, fruits, clothes and cotton and not in cash.<sup>48</sup> When it came to extracting resources, in terms of labour, whether for agricultural works or military, from a fairly small population, the system of *lallup* became very significant. *Lallup* was a conflation of two words, *lal* meaning ‘battle’ and *lup* meaning ‘group’. The system thus referred to the various labour groups, which had been formed primarily to defend the land. But it also included the general internal service to land in the way of

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<sup>45</sup> March Bloch, *Feudal Society Vol 2: Social Classes and Political Organisation*, Taylor & Francis, p.446.

<sup>46</sup>D.D Kosambi, *An Introduction To The Study of Indian History*, Popular Prakash Ltd, Mumabai, 2008.pp.295-353.

<sup>47</sup>ibid

<sup>48</sup> Foreign Dept. Political Branch Consultation No.82, 7<sup>th</sup> Jan 1833.

works relating to roads, bridges, collection of tribute payment, care of water supply, drainage etc. In times of war all males were considered to be on duty. These services were rendered to the country in lieu of a state tax. In this system, all the males aged between 16 to 50 served ten working days in the *lallup* for every forty days. Thus *lallup* covered all the state works, both military and development maintenance.<sup>49</sup>

As has already been mentioned, land was said to belong to the king. Each individual liable for *lallup* was entitled one *puree* (a form of measurement) of land, equivalent to about three English acres, to cultivate and contribute its produce in kind, grain and fruit, as revenue to the king.<sup>50</sup> The tax paid for the land directly to the king varied from two baskets (*sangbai*) to twelve baskets per *puree*.<sup>51</sup>

This system of *lallup* was very similar with the *paik* system of Ahoms in Assam. *Paik* was also a system where all adult males aged between 16 to 50 years, except members of the nobility and privileged members of the high castes were attached to the soil.<sup>52</sup> The subjects, who were eligible for the service of *paiks*, were obliged to be present in rotation. Johnston mentioned that this system in Assam led to the completion of many useful and magnificent public works.<sup>53</sup> The system of *paik* gave Ahom kingdom the advantage of having an incredibly large fighting force during the war and workers for public works. According to Sanjeeb Kakoty, “The *paik* system alone enabled the government to carry out schemes of extensive constructional works throughout the kingdom. The *paik* was organized into *khel* which is comparable to work guilds, each doing a kind of productive work for the state, such as arrow making, boat building, house building, provision supplying, road construction, etc ”.<sup>54</sup>

The *Cheitharol Kumbaba* refers to the *lallup* system in Manipur for the first time during the reign of Loyumba. The feudalization of the handicraft and the king’s control over the economic occupation of his people can be seen to be clearly

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid*

<sup>50</sup> Foreign Dept. Political Branch , 7<sup>th</sup> Jan 1833, Consultation No. 82.

<sup>51</sup> Brown. *op.cit.*p.86.

<sup>52</sup> Guha. *op.cit.*p.8

<sup>53</sup> Jonhstone. *op.cit.* p.110

<sup>54</sup> Kakoty, Sanjeeb. Some Aspects of Military Technology in the Ahom State. In *Early States in North East India*, (edt) J B Bhattacharjee and D R Syiemlieh, Regency Publications and Astral International Pvt.Ltd, New Delhi, 2013,p.93

embodied in the royal decree *Loiyumba Shiyen* issued by him during the latter part of his reign. The royal chronicles (*Cheitharol Kumbaba* and *Ningthaurol Lambuba*) do not mention the *Loiyumba Shiyen*, which is believed to have been a kind of written constitution of the Meiteis. However, *Cheitharol Kumbaba* does mention that all the families bearing one family name were ordered to perform specific duties. Loyumba has been described as one of the principle makers of Manipur.<sup>55</sup> His decree on the reforms of the economic order of the Meitei society laid the foundation of the emerging feudal form, which existed till the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to R.K Jhalajit, “He (Loyumba) was a great reformer. He definitely put an end to a social order prevalent before his time and ushered in a new one.”<sup>56</sup>

This *lallup* system of service to the king remained until very late. Manipur lost her independence to the British in 1891, and they (the British officers) regarded it as forced labor and the system was only abolished after the arrival of the British. Johnstone, however, had a very different view. According to him,

“This system was a good one, and when not carried to excess, pressed heavily on nobody. It was especially adapted to a poor state sparsely populated. In such a state, under ordinary circumstances, where the amount of revenue is small and wages often comparatively high, it is next door to impossible to carry out many much needed-public works by payment. On the other hand, every man in India who lives by cultivation, has much spare time on his hand, and the “Lalloop” system very profitable utilises this, and for the benefit of the community at large. I never heard of it being complained of as a hardship”.<sup>57</sup>

Grimwood also gave her opinion regarding *lallup*: “*lallup* is a system that answered very well, and the people seemed well-to-do and contented”.<sup>58</sup> The people liable to *lallup* were the Meiteis, the Brahmins, and the Musalmans.<sup>59</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, if a man did not come to his *lallup*, he forfeited one rupee, which meant a lot at that time; thus, friends or other members of the family usually provided a substitution.<sup>60</sup> Even sick people were to pay if they missed their *lallup*; none was excused from the

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<sup>55</sup> Jhalajit. Op.cit.63

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Johnstone. op.cit.p.110.

<sup>58</sup> Grimwood. op. cit.p. 42

<sup>59</sup> Hodson. op.cit. *The Meiteis*.p.62.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

system. In case a man of any area found that the work imposed on him or them was beyond his or their ability it was possible to call in men from the whole locality or area till the work was completed.<sup>61</sup>

Although Nagas, Lois and Keis ('they were the sections of people who were considered outcastes or were exiled by Meitei kings due to certain acts of crime they committed and not regarded as welcome in Meitei society') were not liable for *lallup*, they were subject to much heavier duty.<sup>62</sup> It is reported that slavery in Manipur was mild as compared to other parts of the world but it did exist, and tributes from the Nagas and Kabuis (who belonged to the territory of Manipur) to the Manipur king were paid annually.<sup>63</sup> The mode of revenue collection even in such cases was still in kind. But according to Hodson, at the time of the British arrival, certain sections of the society like the Lois paid their revenue in *sel*, the bell metal coinage of the country.<sup>64</sup>

The presence of such a system may be seen as signaling the passage of a society that was organized as tribal polities to that of a form of feudal structure. The system in Manipur had some resemblances with its counterpart in the west. The civil and military arrangements were mostly founded on feudal tenure. In time of peace, it was the custom to employ *lallup* for public works, and this is how the enormous irrigation system, which was important for a self-sufficient economy, and roads, which was vital for communication and trade with its subjects and neighbouring countries came into existence. This maximization of the acquisition of products from a limited population can be seen as one of the key factors of state formation.<sup>65</sup> The development of the *lallup* system is thus a manifestation of the emergence of feudalism in the social, administrative and political structure of the Meitei kingdom.

## 2.5 Administrative Units

The internal organization of the country was mainly based on the system of *lup* or *pana* (sub-division of administration block). Loiyumba was said to have introduced the administrative reforms, which provided the steel frame of the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Hodson. op.cit. *The Meitheis*. p.60

<sup>63</sup> Foreign Dept, Political Branch, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1855, consultation No. 109

<sup>64</sup> Hodson. op.cit. *The Meitheis*.p.36

<sup>65</sup> According to James Scott taxes, conscription, corvee labor and condition of servitude were core elements of state formation. P.7.

administration of the kingdom for about nine centuries. He systematized the administrative divisions of the country by creating six *lupsor panas*.<sup>66</sup> They were Aangoupa lup, Nongmai lup, Akong lup/Kongcha lup, Khurai lup/Lupkhupa lup, Chingcha lup and Khaicha lup. This establishment of the *pana* system by Loiyumba clearly contradicts the claim made by several scholars that Nongda Lairen Pakhangba established the *pana* system. Gangumei is of the opinion that the introduction of the term of *pana* in the revenue administration was an influence of the Shans, who came into contact with Meiteis in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>67</sup> It was during the period of Kyamba that the chronicles record the establishment of two revenue or administrative units known as *Ahallup* and *Nahalup* by appointing two persons as supervisors or *lakpas* of the *panas*. Thangyi Lamlei Yangpa and Yiwangpam Cha Nanpa were the first to become the *Lakpas* of the Ahanlup and Nahalup unit respectively.<sup>68</sup> Later, Khakemba was said to have established *Khabam pana* and *Potsanba pana*.

The central and local administrative system in Manipur before 1825 seems very complicated and blurred. This might be because of a few reasons. First, the Meitei kings, before Garibniwas were still busy in the process of establishing their supremacy over the neighboring villages and hill areas through military power. Secondly, after Garibniwas, the Meitei rulers were too busy in the process of legitimizing state authority under the new religion (Hinduism), which Garibniwas had adopted. The process of Hinduization was never a smooth process; it is quite clear that there was opposition to the process of Hinduization. Starting from the period of Charairongba there are many incidents of burning down of the royal palace and other administrative houses but mostly temples as a form of retaliating against the new faith.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the condition in Manipur after Garibniwas was in turmoil because of frequent raids by the Burmese and also due to an internal conflict among the royal family who were fighting for the throne.

According to Hodson, an elaborate internal organization of Meitei kingdom before the period of First Anglo Burmese War is not very clearly visible because of the devastation of the country and its repeated depopulation.<sup>70</sup> Further, Hodson is of

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<sup>66</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.29

<sup>67</sup> Kabui. op.cit. *The History of Manipur Vol-1*.p.87

<sup>68</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.41

<sup>69</sup> *Cheitharol Kumbaba* recorded frequent retaliation during Charairongba and Garibniwas. It is recorded during Garibniwas that, "Sunday, 19<sup>th</sup> of *Poinu*, *Yumthei* shrine and royal palace was set on fire and those who started the fire were punished on the very next day"

<sup>70</sup> Hodson. op.cit. *The Meiteis*.p.54

the view that the country's administrative system (which continued till 1891) after the Treaty of Yandabo (1825) was the creation of Ghambir Singh.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, Ghambir Singh has been described as the savior of the Meitei nation and maker of modern Manipur.<sup>72</sup> However, Hodson insisted that the administration that was developed by Ghambir Singh was almost completely based on the old model of *lups* or *panas*.<sup>73</sup> He also said that the internal organization of the Pannas was very complicated to fully understand.

Hodson has briefly given the internal political organization of Manipur that was followed by the Meiteis before Manipur became a princely state under British India administration in 1891, broadly as follow, the six Pannas were subdivided into 107 division, exclusive of the villages divisions of Loi and Naga villages. Each of the 107 subdivisions possessed a number numbers of officials, some of whom held “*ex officio*” seats on the *Chirap*, the judicial body in the state. Head of the village is called *Ningthou* literally means ‘king’ but Hodson describe them as a chief officer of the village and next to him was *Khul-lakpa* and *lup-lakpa* ( Hodson didn’t explain in specific). Then came *Khunjahanba* (‘elder of the village’) whose duty was also not defined. The next officer was *Yupalpa* who was responsible to look upon the works of brewing beer from rice and followed by *Naharakpa* who look after the young unmarried man. The remaining officers were *Telloi Hanjaba* and *Telloi Hidang* (their specific duties were not mentioned), *Hinaoba* and *Hiraba* (who were responsible for making and repairing boats), *Lau mi rakpa* and *Lau mi hidang* whose were responsible for the work of the villagers in cultivating the fields. *Thanja Pannaba* looked after iron smelting and the manufacture of iron tools.

Ghambir Singh raised and commanded the Manipur Levy, with the help of British, which operated with success against the Burmese in the Anglo-Burmese War. After the Burmese War, in many respects, Manipur proceeded toward the maturity of the state with the help of the British, the details of which will be discussed in a later chapter. Ghambir Singh maintained the levy as a separate organization. However the *lallup* remained the main principle for various development works in the state. The members of the levy were called *lalmi* or ‘men of war’, and formed a separate

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid .p.58

<sup>72</sup> Kabui, Gangumei, The Glorious exploit of Manipur Levy:1824-35, in *Hueiyen Lanpao* , January 14, 2012

<sup>73</sup> Hodson.op.cit. *The Meitheis*.p.58.



division or section of the community. Thus Ghambir Singh established the first standing army of Manipur.

After the Anglo-Burmese war there was clearly a monopoly of the Nignthuaja families over the state's political organization. The king's sons held all the important posts. The eldest son bore the title *jubraj* and was the crown prince; the next son held the post of *senapati* ('chief of army'), then came *kotwal* or 'head the police', followed by *sagol hanjaba* ('master of the horse'), *samu hanjaba* ('master of the elephant') and finally the *dolaroi hanjaba* ('master of the palanquin'). However, posts like that of the *sagol hanjaba*, *samu hanjaba* and *dolaroi hanjaba* were not always held by the king's sons. Besides the appointments to such posts, all the officers had a seat in the *cheirap*. According to Hodson, the office of *awa purel* or 'foreign minister' seems to have been first created by Chandrakirti (1833-1843).<sup>74</sup>

The establishment of these systems like *lallup* and *panna* certainly brought together a varied and expanded populace within the Meitei administration, and most certainly, a vast state army and community of workers were created. Thus the creation of these systems (*lallup* and *panna*) was both a political and economic exigency.

## 2.6 Social stratification

There was a transformation in terms of expanding socio, political, economy and territorial acquisitions. Thus in all cases, a developing Meitei society provided the elements of organization from which a relevant state could emerge. However, there is a lack of some important aspects which can contribute towards a more centralized state, i.e. there was not an elaborate social hierarchy or stratification of class. Social hierarchy in Meitei society was indeed a complicated one. Stratification of the class which is based on economic criteria remained mostly under-developed before the advent of Hinduism. However, the notion of rich and poor could be seen after the advent of Hinduism which will be discussed briefly in the economy chapter.

Given the importance of religion and its rituals, it might seem natural that the priest would occupy a critical position in every medieval society. My next chapter will focus on the religion and its ritual before and after the advent of Hinduism in Manipur. However it is important to refer to it here briefly in order to give the picture

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<sup>74</sup> *ibid*

of social stratification. Before the advent of Hinduism, it is clear that the Meitei priest known as *maiba/maibi* occupied a critical position in the society and court. The *maiba* was the male priest while the *maibi* was the female priest. Their roles as discussed in the royal chronicles will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Suffice to say here for now that they were important figures in rituals and festivals. They also did the job of medicinal practitioners while also being referred in relation to scholastic work in the royal court. It is clear that they were also the advisors and the fortunetellers of the king. For instance, it is recorded in the *Ningthaurol Lambuba* that,

“King Naothingkhong was about to go hunting; he was stopped by a *maibi*. She told him not to go because in her dream the journey could be bad for the king”.<sup>75</sup>

King Naothingkhong’s (CE 663) coronation ceremony, the chronicle also reveals, was completed with an offering of a live cock, a variety of sacred plants and chanting of hymns by the *maibas*<sup>76</sup> The ritual of *eratpa* (‘appeasement rite’) was also performed by the *maibas/maibis*. Further more, rites such as the enticing and charming of snakes were also done by *maibas/maibis*. And in the case of non-Meitei conversion into Meitei belief, such rituals were also performed by these ritual priests. All these evidence from the chronicles go to show that in the roles that they performed, the *maibas/maibis* enjoyed a very high and important status in Meitei society. Parratt citing Shakespear regarded the *maibi* (female priest) as playing a more prominent role than *maiba* (male priest) in the festivals and the *lais* are thought to take more pleasure in women than in men.<sup>77</sup>

With the adoption of Hinduism by Garibniwas, we find that the brahmins began to replace the authority and status of the *maibas* and *maibis*. Society seems to have become more stratified as a result of Hinduization. As Hinduism began to be more established, the term *hao* (a derogatory word) began to be applied to the non-Hindu population in the valley but particularly to the hill peoples. The social perception of human inequality based on birth, the breakdown of the traditional

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<sup>75</sup> *Ningthaurol Lambuba*.p.64.

<sup>76</sup> Parratt, Saroj Nalini, *The Pleasing of the God.: Lai Meitei Haraoba*. Vikash Publishing House Pvt LTD. Delhi .1997.p.14

<sup>77</sup> *ibid*

egalitarian social structure of the land thus began to take place. We will discuss the process of Hinduism fully in the next chapter.

There are frequent entries in the chronicles of people who defied the king's order or those who were punished for stealing, for murder or any other kind of anti-social activities, being sent to the outskirts of the kingdom. Such groups were referred to as *Loi thaba* (from *loi* meaning 'exile' and *thaba* meaning 'send') from very early in Manipur history. They were mostly sent to the place called Sugunu and Kakching. Those who were thus exiled were referred to as a community, the *Lois*. The *Lois* were not regarded as part of the Meitei fold, nor were they part of the *lallup* system. However, they were forced to give higher duties and were asked to pay their tributes in cash. They were also forced to engage mostly in smelting iron, distilling of spirits, making earthen vessels for storing water or cooking, cutting wood, manufacturing salt, fishing, cutting grass for animals for the royal ponies and other animals.<sup>78</sup> Manufacturing of silk was also entirely in the hand of part of the population of the *Lois*. According to both Brown and Hodson, anyone who wanted to engage in silk culture had to lose their specific social position and become a *Loi*.<sup>79</sup>

Further, the accumulation of population by war may have contributed to the construction of social hierarchy in Manipur. It is very critical to push forward this factor (of war captives) for developing any form of social hierarchy in Manipur although no source has mentioned the use of war captives as slaves. However, it is a well-known phenomenon to use war captives as forced labour or slaves in early state formation. Slavery was not properly mentioned in the royal chronicles of Manipur. Regarding slavery in Manipur, most of the colonial writing and Manipuri historians were mainly based on Mc Culloch's work According to Mc Culloch,

“If the word ‘slaves’ has conveyed to the mind the idea of people in the condition of slaves of America, it is wrong one. Many becomes slaves voluntarily; some of the with the view of discharging a money debt which they cannot otherwise do, and some from sheer laziness. They live in the same house as their master, eat with him, and are altogether like member of the family. To abuse and ill use slaves is the exception. These remarks refer more especially to Munniporees in a state of slavery. The hill people occasionally

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<sup>78</sup> Hodson.Op.cit. *The Meitheis*.p.30

<sup>79</sup> Brown. op.cit.p.90.

sell themselves; but more frequently they are sold by their relatives. There are two description of slaves;-one, the absolute property of the buyer called “ menaichaba” the other “aslaba” or a slave for such time, as the money paid to him or advanced on him may not be paid back. The later is like giving works in lieu of the interest of the money paid, and should the person who becomes “asalba” get sick, he is obliged to give a substitute, or make good in coin the labour lost in the interval of sickness. The hill people who are slaves are not perhaps so well treated as the Munniporees in the state of slavery, but there are checks upon ill-use. If not satisfied with their condition they run to some other house where slaves are better treated”.<sup>80</sup>

Brown, adding to that of Mc Culloch, said that “people were made slaves for certain crime they had committed”.<sup>81</sup> In case of stealing, when the culprit was caught but the goods were not recovered in full then he/she and his/her family may be seized and sold until the claim for the stolen goods was recovered.<sup>82</sup> From the available sources, it is feasible to conclude that slavery arose mainly out of two conditions in Manipur. Firstly, if a man or woman could not return a debt in full, then she would have to serve their creditor as a slave for a certain period of time. Secondly, a man not in debt could also become a slave in exchange for money when it was required immediately. In both the cases being a slave was just a temporary condition, which leads one to believe that they were more of a house-help rather than slaves in the strict sense of the word. Sources only occasionally refer to them being badly treated, but they were usually considered part of the family.<sup>83</sup>

Slavery in Manipur also failed to develop as a mode of production as in other societies. Slaves were not productively engaged in agriculture or any other activities as the main subject for economic growth. Brown also said that it would be too harsh to level the term ‘slavery’ in Manipur with that of the European idea of slavery.<sup>84</sup> There is no single puya or British account that shows the possession of slaves by any particular family other than in the king’s possession. Brown recorded that the number

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<sup>80</sup> Culloch.op.cit.pp.24-25

<sup>81</sup> Brown. op.cit. p.91

<sup>82</sup> Ibid

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> ibid

of slaves under Manipur king at the time was approximately around 1,200 to 1,500.<sup>85</sup> Slaves under the Meitei king's possession were mainly from specific communities like the Ayokpas, Tankhuls, and Keis who were not in the Meitei fold.<sup>86</sup>

Many other occupations that were quite common in medieval Indian society were absent in Manipur in the corresponding period. Thus, for instance, we do not find any money-lenders, and even those engaged in commercial activities were usually women which meant that they were not a caste group. The social hierarchy in Manipuri was mainly due to the religion or ritual authority.

## 2.7 Conclusion

The emergence of early state formation in Manipur was predominantly based on socio-economic, political and administrative initiatives of the Ningthauja clan. Under the leadership of the Ningthaujas, the social and political system in Manipur evolved from various petty chiefdoms to a Meitei kingdom. Due to geographical conditions of the valley, Meitei kings needed manpower in order to broaden the agrarian settlement. The growth of population was achieved through war captives and inducing immigration from the neighbouring countries. The idea of “concentration of man power” was not only bringing more people in the valley but also how to control and exploit them.

One of the prominent features of Manipur in the process of early state formation is the system of *lallup*. Their political organization and administrative system was mainly based on the *lups* and *lallup* system. The system of *lallup* became the coercive power of the Meitei kings to maintain and exploit the population of Manipur. Thus the idea of ‘concentration of man power’ is significantly suitable in case of early state formation of Manipur. Further, a sufficient economic structure of Manipur was enhanced by acquiring cash revenue from its extending territory over the hills and non-Meitei tribal areas in the valley. By broadening agrarian settlement and collecting its revenue, Manipur became a sufficient economy.

The factors for the early state formation in Manipur did not appear uniformly. However, there were progressive changes, characterized by the evolution of kingship, territorial expansion, an extension of broad agrarian settlement and extensive forms of

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<sup>85</sup> *ibid*  
<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*

controlling its subject, politically and economically, under the feudal system of *lallup*. With this brief enquiry into the existence, or otherwise of the feudal elements in the structure of the Meitei state in the pre-colonial period of history of Manipur, it is clear that feudalism in the European form did not exist in Manipur. However, the feudal elements and feudal nuances were found in the structure of the polity and the societal relationship in society in the pre-colonial Manipur.

## Chapter 3

### Religion: before and after the advent of Hinduism

“The history of great civilizations can be depicted as a series of major events- wars, reign, and revolutions- which, whether or not they shape it, at least major changes in its course. Or it can be depicted as succession not of dates, places and prominent persons, but of general phases of sociocultural development”.<sup>1</sup> The latter approach represents historical changes as a relatively continuous social and cultural process, which may display slow transformations but also shows patterned alterations. The process of socio-cultural changes of certain periods can be discerned only when the entire context of the processes are analyzed.

With the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the socio-religious history of Manipur took a new turn. Hinduism was adopted as the state religion in Manipur. Here lies the interesting question as to why and how Hinduism received royal patronage and reached its popularity in such a short period. According to Bhairabhi Prasad Sahu, the sphere of influence of Brahminical traditions was extended through the emulation of its rituals by people who considered themselves to be superior or were desirous of raising their own status by participating in Brahminical rites and rituals.<sup>2</sup> As for the Bhakti movement, it has often been seen as a platform to oppose the centralizing Mughal state.<sup>3</sup> However, its understanding of divine grace as a means of attaining salvation as well as its emphasis on nearness to god as a reason for spreading its belief system cannot also be neglected. Thus we need to see whether the Hinduisation of the Meiteis occurred as a result of Brahmanization or as a result of the Bhakti movement or whether there were other reasons that have not been noticed earlier.

As we have observed, the Meitei confederation was formed by the integration of various clans, and immigrants from Assam, Bengal, Burma as well as the neighbouring tribes. The Ningthaujas, the ruling clan was definitely searching for elements to

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<sup>1</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The state theater in Nineteenth Century Bali* .Princeton University Press, New Jersey. 1980.p 5

<sup>2</sup> Sahu, Bhairabi Prasad. Brahmanical Ideology, Regional Identities, And the Construction of Early India. In *Social Scientist* , Vol-29, No7/8 (July August) 2001.p. 6

<sup>3</sup> Chandra, Satish, *Historiography, Religion and State in Medieval India*, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1996.p.110.

legitimize their authority. Whether Hinduism came to play an important role in the Meitei consolidation consciously or unconsciously in the beginning is not clear. However, it definitely became a conscious choice in the later years of the establishment of the Ningthaujas. It is found from the royal chronicles and colonial reports that Hinduism found increasing favour with the successive kings and the consequences were much wider and also much richer. In this chapter, I will look into the place of Hindu religion as an instrument for the extension of central political authority. This chapter is concerned with the issues that had a bearing on the relationship between religion and the politics of the Meitei kings. My attempt is to see how, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Hinduism took hold of Manipur valley to such an extent that it received state support and ultimately became the religion of the state. It forms part of a larger work on the processes of state formation under the Meitei kings. I will focus on the certain significant developments marked by Hinduism like innovative ritual formations, temple building, and image worshipping. However, it is impossible to conclude anything without having any knowledge regarding the nature of beliefs among the Meiteis before the advent of Hinduism in Manipur. This chapter will start by looking at the religious beliefs among the Meiteis before Hinduism became a state religion of Manipur.

### **3.1 Religious Philosophy of Meitei before the advent of Hinduism**

Primitive religion concerned itself with the dynamic forces of nature and life, birth and death, marriage, the rains and the growth of crops.<sup>4</sup> Through sympathetic magic and myths, the power of nature was brought into harmony with human needs. There were various forms of beliefs among the early Meiteis. This versatile scene of traditional faith should be comprehended considering the context of legitimizing process of the Kingship. This chapter intends to focus more on the system of legitimization of Meitei kings. A sense of separating the rulers from their subjects, in the form of possessing higher powers of some kind, is a universal phenomenon. According to Thapar, the origin of divine kingship is significant in emphasizing the special nature of the rulers and separation of

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<sup>4</sup> MacLennan. S F, Religion and Anthropology in *The Journal of religion*. Vol -2, No- 6 (November 1992) .pp. 612-613



the nobility from their subjects.<sup>5</sup> The global experience of the rise of early states suggests that there were several factors for the growth of the state in the early history of human. The divine origin was authored by most states to give the legitimacy to the assumed authority of the rulers only after the rulers had already been established.<sup>6</sup>

Creation of the myth of the divine origin of kings in the course of early state formation is a common factor in most of the ancient civilizations like that of Egypt, but also in ancient and medieval India including that of Northeast India, among the Ahoms, Chutiyas, etc. Like the other civilizations Meiteis also had a complex religious philosophy, and it was *maibas* and *maibis* (the male and female priests, respectively) who controlled the traditional Meitei religious philosophy. Myths and legends were created by *maibis* and *maibas*, in the form of written texts, to connect their patrons with the divine power to ensure total political, social and religious subjugation of the people to the ruling kings. Similar traditions of *maiba/maibi* were also found in the traditions of Southeast Asia. In Burma, there is a female priest, who performs the shaman's rituals, called *mibaya*.<sup>7</sup> Although *mibaya* sounds similar to that of *maibi/maiba*, the former means queen in Burmese. According to Parratt, even though there are a number of differences between the functions of the Burmese *mibaya* and those of the Meitei *maibi*, both *mibaya* and *maibi* were priestesses who invoked the *lais* ('deities' –male and female) and received oracles from the *lais*, giving them out to the common people.<sup>8</sup> Both of them (*maiba/maibi*) were also expert in singing and dancing.

*Meiteis* had their own mythical explanations about how Pakhangba managed to reorganize the world so that he could be entitled to rule over the various clans and tribes in Manipur. It is recorded in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* that Pakhangba was a *lai* (god) at night and human during the daytime.<sup>9</sup> Once, Queen Laisana accused Pakhangba for having an affair with someone; Pakhangba then explained to her regarding his avatar of

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<sup>5</sup> Thapar, Romila, *From Lineage to State: Social Formations in Mid-First Mellenium B.C. In The Ganga Valley*. Oxford Univesity Press, New Delhi, 1984,p.8

<sup>6</sup>(Edt) J.B Bhattacharjee and D.R. Syiemlieh, *Early States in North East India*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2013,p.12

<sup>7</sup> Parratt, Saroj Nalini. Op.cit.. *The pleasing of The Gods*..pp.32-33

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.21

being *lai* at night to protect the people of the land. After this, the queen insisted that she too wanted to become a *lai*. Pakhangba then explained to Laisana that only he could become both *lai* and human as he came down from the heaven, which she could not.<sup>10</sup> Pakhangba is commonly interpreted as a combination of two words, *pa* (father) and *khangba* (to know). According to Parratt, the term *nongda* means ‘incarnate from heaven’. Parratt sees *nong* as ‘heaven’, *da* or *ta* as ‘down’ and put it together as the ‘one who comes down to earth from heaven’. The middle name *Lairen* literally means ‘python’, which is considered as Pakhangba’s omen. The symbol of Pakhangba as python is supported by the chronicles and other myths and folklores. However, according to Parratt, *lai* mean ‘god’ and *ren* means ‘chief’ suggesting that he was considered as both ‘god’ and ‘man’ or ‘chief of gods’.<sup>11</sup>

There are other important deities which are often mentioned in the oral and royal chronicles of Manipur. According to Parratt, the supreme god of the Meitei is *Atiya Sidaba* or ‘Immortal Sky’. According to a Meitei myth, Pakhangba was the son of *Atiya Sidaba* and *Laisana*.<sup>12</sup> The myth is that *Atiya Sidaba* had two sons, namely, Pakhangba and Sanamahi. One day the Supreme God had to choose a King to rule the Kingdom from among his two sons. So *Atiya Sidaba* told his sons to go around the universe seven times to attain more knowledge and whoever came back first would be a King. Sanamahi (the older one) physically went around the universe seven times. But Pakhangba (the younger one) went around his father’s throne seven times. Lord *Atiya Sidaba* was pleased with his younger son’s wisdom, gave the throne to him and Sanamahi was granted the gift of becoming a household deity.<sup>13</sup>

In present Manipur, Sanamahi is an integral part of Meitei society (to both, those who had converted into Hinduism and those who had not). It was considered by the Meiteis as their old traditional faith. Sanamahi is kept and worshiped in every household regardless of clans. The research on Sanamahism is yet to be critically done, and it cannot be totally analyzed here in my thesis. It is believed that the worship of Sanamahi was

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

<sup>11</sup> Parratt. *op.cit*, *The pleasing of The Gods* . p. 10

<sup>12</sup> Parratt, *op.cit*. *Cheitharol Kumababa* .p.22.

<sup>13</sup> Parratt, *Op.cit*. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.22 and Brara, N Vijaylakshmi, *Politics, Society and Cosmology in India’s North East*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998. p.p.47-48

forbidden by Garibniwas (after he introduced Hinduism as the state religion) and it was revived during the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century by the group called *Apokpa Marup*.<sup>14</sup> It is very interesting that the name of Sanamahi does not occur in the royal chronicles until the time of Garibniwas, by which time Hinduism had a strong hold in the kingdom. It is strange that such an important deity as Sanamahi was not mentioned in the early part of the royal chronicles. According to Parratt, there are few possibilities of the fact that it was not mentioned frequently or not mentioned in the early part (before Garibniwas) of the royal chronicle. Firstly *Sanamahi* might have been introduced by Garibniwas himself, which seems rather unlikely, as Garibniwas himself had introduced Hinduism as the state religion.<sup>15</sup> Another possibility is that since *Sanamahi* was explicitly a household deity it did not play any important role in the state formation.

*Ningthaurol Lambuba* often mentioned the name of goddesses *Panthoibi* and *Phaoibi*. The royal chronicles refer to *Phaoibi* as the goddess of harvest. For instance, the *Ninthaurol Lambuba* says,

“During the harvesting month, the king and his nobles worshipped Phaoibi before harvesting the field. Goddess Phaoibi blessed us with good products”.<sup>16</sup>

There are also other such incidents where the goddess Phaoibi was worshipped before the harvest.<sup>17</sup> From *Cheitharol Kumbaba* we also know the worship of *Koubru*. *Koubru* was believed to have his abode in the peak, which bears his name, situated at the northern end of the Manipur valley. There are a few references to the worship of *Koubru* in both *Cheitharol Kumbaba* and *Ningthaurol Lambuba*, but unfortunately the sentences are very obscure. For instance, in *Ningthaurol Lambuba* most of the king's deeds referred to *Koubru* as, “King Ayamba (or any name of the king) was brave in the *Koubru*”. And, “at the foothill of *Koubru*, king and his noble prayed to *Korauhanba Numit* (Sun) and from this period onwards, Meitei started offering prayers to the *Koubru*”.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Wangkhemcha. op.cit.p.13

<sup>15</sup> Parratt.op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.115.

<sup>16</sup> Oinam Bhogeshwar Singh. *Ningthourol Lambuba, vol.1* M.J.Printing Works, Imphal.1967.p.58

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.p.67, 81.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.p.213.

During the reign of Kyamba, *Cheitharol Kumbaba* gives a detailed account of the worship of *Koubru* together with other *lais* (name not mentioned) at the Kuchu. The worship of *Koubru* in this case is presented in the form of offering animal sacrifice. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* gives the list of animals that were offered to *Koubru*. The event is recorded as such,

“On the foothill of Kuchu, prodigious offering was made to *Lai Koubru*. This ritual consisted of 100 each of buffaloes, goats, sheep, pigs, fowls, pigeons, dogs, fruits and ginger”.<sup>19</sup>

It has been accepted by many scholars that there were gods of the geographical directions in Manipur and *Koubru* was considered as the guardian of the direction northwest.<sup>20</sup> Further, Parratt mentioned others, namely *Thanjing* (also a name of mountain) as the guardian of the South-west, and *Wangbaren* as the guardian of South-east.<sup>21</sup> However, there were hardly any incidents, related to the *Thanjing* and *Wangbaren* recorded in the royal chronicles.

There are also numerous references in the *Ningthaurol Lambuba* and *Cheitharol Kumbaba* which show that tree-reverence was very common during the period. However, there is no indication of the *lais* to whom the trees were dedicated or whether the tree was thought to be associated with particular known deities. Unfortunately, all the references given in the text are so cryptic that safe conclusion is little possible from them.

One of the main ceremonies among the Meiteis is called *Lai Haraoba*. *Lai Haraoba* means ‘pleasing the gods’.<sup>22</sup> According to Parratt, the *Lai Haraoba* festival is probably the most authentic of all the religious rituals of the Manipur people and the one

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<sup>19</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.57

<sup>20</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *The Pleasing Of The God*.p.5

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibidp.18

which most closely preserves the ancient culture of the Meiteis.<sup>23</sup> The essence of the ceremony was to please the *lais* in order to gain their favour.<sup>24</sup>

The text based on *Lai haraoba* was passed down by oral transmission, and it was the responsibility of the maibas/maibis and *penakhongba* (*pena* is a ‘musical instrument,’ and *khongba* means ‘player’) to preserve them. According to Parratt, this oral tradition of *Lai Haraoba* has its roots in pre-literary Meitei society and is therefore older than the earliest examples of the archaic written Meiteilon.<sup>25</sup> Some of the important elements or procedure or rituals of the *Lai Haraoba* are singing of the song *yakaiba* (sung as an aubade to the god), playing *pena*, and singing an *oukari*. According to Parratt, “*Oukari* was a song sung for or by kings and it contains the king’s achievements, power and lineage.”<sup>26</sup> Further, Parratt said that, “It was sung while the king himself performed the war dance as if to challenge anyone who would not accept his suzerainty over them.”<sup>27</sup> The singing of *oukari* and *yakaiba* was recorded for the first time during king Loiyumpa. It is recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba*,

“Loiyumba captured Khomareng, the king of Leihou. The singing of Oukari began from this time”<sup>28</sup>

The ceremony of *Lai Haraoba* highlighted the entire culture of the early Meiteis. It reveals its strengths and weakness, the beliefs and superstitious. Most importantly, it reflects the interest or association with either the Meitei kings or chiefs of various clans.

Various forms of *Lai Haraoba* (in honour of various deities) have been still carried on in the state of Manipur among the Meiteis. But the most important *Lai Haraobas* were those which are done for worshipping their specific clan’s chief, and they (clans’ chiefs) were addressed as *lainingthau* which meant ‘sovereignty god’.<sup>29</sup> The names of the tribal deities are found in each clan’s genealogy as *Luang Pokpa* (‘ancestor of the Luwang’), *Khuman Pokpa* (‘ancestor of the Khumans’) and it is the same with the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.p.20

<sup>26</sup> Parratt,op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.29.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Ibid p.29.

<sup>29</sup> Parratt op.cit.. *The Peasing Of The Gods*.p 3

other clans too.<sup>30</sup> It is not yet sure that the practice of worshipping each own clan chief was there during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century due to the religious policy of Hinduised Meitei kings in the valley. However, it might have reappeared during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the revival movement of traditional faith against the pro-Hindu society in the valley of Manipur. Here, the question arises regarding how every clan could worship their own chief in spite of presence of the Meitei kings .That means that every clan was more associated with their own chief. There was no homogenous religious ideology; religious practice varied widely among the clans. It shows there was fluidity and tolerance toward every clan’s ideology. But, after the advent of Hinduism, the structure and ideology of Meitei society was changed. The process of Hinduization in Manipur valley was started by the immigrant Brahmins from the neighbouring states like Assam but, most importantly, from Bengal.

### 3.2 Emergence of Brahmins in Manipur

The arrival of brahmins to the valley, according to the royal chronicles started from the period of Kyamba (1467-1508). Both, the *Bamon Meihaubarol* and the *Bamon Khunthoklon* mentioned Kyamba’s period as the earliest date for the arrival of the brahmins in Manipur.Both these works are *puyas* that give us an account of brahmin immigration and settlement in Manipur from Kyamba till Nara Singh. Here is a table that shows how many brahmins had come and settled in Manipur during each reign of the king as recorded in ‘Bamon Meihaubarol’ and ‘Bamon Khunthoklon’ .

Name of the king	Bamon Meihaubarol	Bamon Khunthoklon
Kyamba	6	18
Nongeenphaba	0	2
Chalamba	1	2
Mungyamba	1	1
Khakemba	8	10

<sup>30</sup> Brara.op.cit.p.78.

Paikhomba	6	6
Garibniwas	5	10
Bhagyachandra	5	5
Ghambir Singh	4	6
Nara Singh	2	0

Although both sources differ from each other with regard to the number of brahmins who were said to have come to Manipur, it nonetheless is evident that they did come. Besides this evidence, we also know that from the time of Kyamba (1467-1508), the post of *Cheithapa* began to be filled by non-Meiteis, namely the brahmins who were also married to Meitei women. According to Gangmumei Kabui, Kyamba's stable and powerful kingdom provided shelter to the immigrants, especially the brahmins, during the period of great Muslim expansion in India and this stability attracted people of then neighbouring countries.<sup>31</sup> Further other Manipuri scholars like Bijoykumar and Kunjabehari, also have the same view that the settlement or immigration of brahmins in Manipur might be due to the rise of Muslim power in neighbouring states like Bengal and certain parts of Assam.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, according to Pushpa Niyogi, the main reason behind brahmin immigration into Manipur was the gifting of land to the brahmins by the Meitei rulers.<sup>33</sup>

Besides brahmins there were other Hindus and Muslims who were part of the new settlers. Thus it was believed that there was an enormous increase in the number of immigrants from the west of Manipur during the period of Khagemba (1597-1652). For instance, according to a text, *Bhagyanchandra charit*, Cachar had attempted to invade the Meitei kingdom but they were defeated by Khagemba. After the war, Khagemba and his army captured many Hindus and Muslims and the Hindus were made to settle at a place named Lammaangdong, which was later called Bishnupur.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Op.cit. Kabui, *History of Manipur Vol-1*.p.102

<sup>32</sup> Singh, Kh. Bijoykumar, *Craft of Hinduism and State formation in pre-modern Manipur* in H. Sudhir's *Social History of Manipur*. P.73

<sup>33</sup> Niyogi, op.cit..p. 4

<sup>34</sup> Bijay Panchali p.p. 33-34

Thus brahmins started coming to Manipur from different parts of northern India from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and the migration continued until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, these brahmins did not occupy a special position in the Meitei society. However, the situation changed from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century when Garibniwas, the ruler himself adopted Hinduism .

### 3.3 Possible causes for propagating Hinduism

R Brown had written about the religion of the Meiteis thus: “The religion of the country [Manipur] is ostensibly Hinduism, and this is apparently of comparatively recent introduction”.<sup>35</sup> Scholars are agreed on the fact that the Hinduism prior to its adoption by Garibniwas in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was just prevalent among the brahmin immigrants. There was in fact very little influence of Hinduism before Charairongba (1679-1709). Although Hinduism’s effect on Manipur was minor, this period from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century might be considered as the gestation period for the later adoption and development of the Hindu religion in the state.

In this period, brahmins might have had an increasingly appreciative audience among the royal family because of their knowledge of astronomy. Hindu hierarchical system, reflected in Hindu myth, might have offered crucial impetus to the Meitei royal families who desired to concentrate their authority in the community. The royal families might also have been impressed with the contents of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Puranic gods and spiritual powers of *yogis* and *rishis*. However, any evidence related to the above possible reasons is not recorded in any of the puyas.

The influence of brahmins can be seen clearly from the period of Charairongba (1679-1709) but it was Garibniwas (1709-1748) who imposed the faith on the Meiteis as a state religion. It is recorded in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* that,

“Towards the beginning of the month, [name of the month not mentioned] *Ningthem* (the king) and some others accepted the Hindu faith from guru Gopal Das”.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> . Brown, op.cit. p.75.

<sup>36</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba Vol-1*.p.124



With its adoption by the ruler, Hinduism increased its stronghold in the social, political, and religious life of Manipur. While looking at the possible causes regarding the initiation of Hinduism in Manipur, we cannot neglect internal and external factors i.e, socio-political conditions of the Meitei kingdom and the background history of the neighbouring states like Assam, Cachar and Myanmar at the period.

Through the royal chronicles of the Manipur state and colonial writings (especially from Shakespear), it is apparent that the Meiteis worshiped many kinds of traditional deities before the advent of Hinduism. The Meitei traditional faith, which has often been described as compact was in fact not practiced uniformly throughout the region. In the early part of the chapter we have seen that there were obvious variations of the traditional faith among the various clans (who formed the Meitei fold). However, there were also some prominent and well-acknowledged deities among them, such as *Pakhangba*, *Umanglai* ('god of the forest'), and *Sanamahi* ('household deity') as well as the ancestors of each clan. While the expansion of the royal lineage was under way, the members of different clans might have asserted their presence and antagonism against the royal lineage through worshiping their respective ancestors.

The process of Hinduization in the Meitei kingdom might have been deeply enhanced by the forces of internal crisis like intrigues to dethrone the ruling king and also external invasions (Burmese invasion). There is enough evidence to show that the period during which Hinduism was adopted by the Meitei king was a period of uncertainty at different levels. For instance, for the first time, during Charairongba's reign (1697-1709), there was a plot to overthrow the King Charairongba. This is recorded in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* in the following manner:

“Saturday, full moon, Naosam Aoroi, the Pukhranpa (name of a post) and others who tried to put Yipungo Loiyumpa on the throne, and who started the fire at the royal great palace for the same purposed were punished”<sup>37</sup>

A total number of thirty-one people who were involved in the incident were punished with death.<sup>38</sup> Charairongba was the first king to take a sacred thread as a sign of

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<sup>37</sup> Parratt.op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p112.

converting into Hinduism.<sup>39</sup> Further, in his son, Garibniwas's early stages as a ruler, there were plots of witchcraft against him and the queen. It is recorded in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* that,

“...on Thursday, Yipungo Kongyampa who lived in Aakoijam, and Sanlam Aapang, these two were using black arts against the king, both of them were killed; king's younger brother who plotted the incident and Sanlam's family were wiped out”.<sup>40</sup>

Similar incidents have been recorded three times in the royal chronicle during the early part of Garibniwas's reign (1709-1748). Brown also supported that there was a plot to kill Garibniwas when he was just four years old.<sup>41</sup> These events of attacking the reigning monarch during Charairongba and in his early period might be the reason that Garibniwas decided to concretize the authority of the sovereign at another level, that of the spiritual, which the other king had not yet achieved, which drove him to proceed with the sudden change in the state religion.

There is also a story that Garibniwas killed his father Charairongba and became the king.<sup>42</sup> There is thus a controversy over Garibniwas's accession because of his origin and position among the royal blood. There is a belief that he was originally a Naga and that he was adopted by Charairongba.<sup>43</sup> Brown recorded that,

“Until the year 1714 there is nothing of special interest in the history of Manipur. Pamheiba/Garibniwas, who appeared to have been a Naga boy, brought up and adopted by the Raja Churai Romba, shot his adopted father, it is said, accidentally whilst hunting, and succeeded him”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> “Ningthem Charairongba and all those who were to accept the name of a Hindu lai fasted. Those (who fasted with king) were made to accept the Hindu lai on that day”. Parratt. op.cit.*Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.113.

<sup>40</sup> Parratt. Op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. p122

<sup>41</sup> Brown.op.cit.p.59.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

Brown said that account of Garibniwas's origin (being Naga origin) was denied by the Meities. He further recorded an explanation given to him by the Meiteis as follows,

“The father of Pamheiba/Garibniwas was, they say, the Raja Churai Romba himself: the name of his mother was Nungtil Chaibi, one of the raja's wives but not the head of the wife or rani. The custom at the time in Manipur was to kill all male children by any wives except rani. Nungtil Chaibi concealed the fact of the birth of Pamheiba, and anxious to save his life, persuaded her father to take charge of him. This he did, and carried off the child to the village of Tangal, in the hills to the north occupied by the Quireng tribe of Nagas. Time went on and the rani having no family, there arose a difficulty about the succession. The Raja was unaware up to this time of the existence of his son Pamheiba, although he had a suspicion of the fact. He made a declaration before all his wives that, if any of them should have concealed a male child, they would be freely forgiven, and the child be made his heir. The mother of Pamheiba promised to make enquiries if the Raja would swear that no harm would befall the child, and on his doing so, she confessed to the existence of Pamheiba. The boy was sent for, and acknowledged by the raja and people to be the son of Churai Romba.”<sup>45</sup>

The custom of killing the sons of King's wives (except Queen's son) seems little possibilities but it is hard to conclude without sufficient evidence. But one thing is clear that there was a connection between Garibniwas and the Naga. If it was true that he was a Naga origin, there is a distinct possibility that Garibniwas, being insecure about the throne led him to establish the new faith. That would also explain his drive and the degree of ruthlessness in enforcing the new faith. He destroyed many traditional *lais* ('local deities') and also burnt earlier texts. This event of burning ancient texts is still remembered today among the Meiteis as the '*Puya Meithaba*'. Along with the measures to annihilate previous beliefs and practices, Garibniwas actively took up a number of

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

measures to spread Hinduism in Manipur. He ordered to discontinue all the ceremonies and rituals of the old Meitei faith, and Hindu ceremonies and rituals substituted them.

Santidas Mahanta's role in the Hinduization of Manipur has been stressed by many scholars. According to Gangmumei Kabui, Shantidas was a very intelligent brahmin scholar who was bent on transforming the social and political system of the country.<sup>46</sup> Shantidas has been described as the driving force behind the intensive and suppressive Hinduization of the state. He might have been the guru of the king of which there are a number of references in the royal chronicle. He is said to have accompanied the king in his official and pleasure trips. It is recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, "Wednesday, the Guru and *Ningthem*, these two followed by others left to attack Maring" and "Wednesday, the Guru, *Ningthem* and the *Sicha* (Queen) went to Nungkei to feast on mangoes," and many more such events were noted.<sup>47</sup> He is said to have influenced the king to destroy the shrines of the traditional deities and many of the *puyas*. According to the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, it was on the advice of Santidas Mahanta that the king destroyed the image of Sanamahi and other deities of Umanglais. The *Chietharol Kumbaba* gives the reference as,

"7<sup>th</sup> *Langpan*, it was declared that nine *Umang lais*, two *lammapi lais* were not to be regarded as *lais* and all their shrines were demolished"<sup>48</sup>

In 1648 Sak, in the month of *Yingen*, *Laiyingthau Panthoibi*, *Laiwa Haipa* and two *Lammapis*, *Soraren*, *Hoiton Pokpi*, the images of these several *lais* were smashed. In one incident, the temple of Hanuman was constructed where there was a shrine of *Panthoibi* earlier.<sup>49</sup> There are many more instances of traditional deities being destroyed in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* during the reign of Garibniwas. Santidas is said to have given Manipur its present name, assigned *gotras* to the seven clans of the Meitei society and, introduced many Hindu festivals. It is still believed by the Meiteis that Shantidas had

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<sup>46</sup> Kabui.op.cit. History of Manipur.p.253

<sup>47</sup> Parratt.op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumababa*. pp.134-169.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid p.171.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid .p.81

been instrumental in pushing through the measures that led to the syncretistic transformation of religion in Manipur.

The beginning of the Hinduization process under Garibniwas could be seen as a result of political motives. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* records that Garibniwas put up a decree on the gate of the main palace mentioning that the barbers and the *teli* (who were engaged in extracting oil) of hindu immigrant were to intermarry with Meitei women.<sup>50</sup> He wanted to unify them within the people of Manipur even through matrimonial alliances. Garibniwas also built a temple at the centre of Khunpi (Maring Village).<sup>51</sup> He also introduced the post of *haorampu*. They were officials posted in the hills and given certain minor powers concerning law and order amongst the people in the hills.<sup>52</sup> This shows that he even tried to extend the unification process to the hills as well. However, his drive to unify hill people under Hinduism was not successful. Instead, Hinduism brought further separation between hill people and valley people.

Many actions carried out by Garibniwas prove his political acuity in order to legitimize himself on the throne. Most of these had symbolic connotations. For instance, he performed an event called *Phampan lal* (*Phampan*: 'throne'; *lal*: 'war' thereby meaning, 'war for the throne') whereby a raid was enacted to mark the crowning of the Meitei king.<sup>53</sup> Someone or something had to be captured on this occasion by the king himself or by someone on his behalf.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, he also introduced the tradition of the public appearance of the ruler in front of the palace gate. A *Yakeipa* song (normally sung as an aubade to the god) was then sung for the ruler every morning.<sup>55</sup> In doing so, the status of the king was greatly enhanced by addressing the king as a deity. In fact, Garibniwas was the first Meitei king who was deified. An idol representing him continues to be in the temple of Ramji Prabhu in Wangkhei, Imphal.<sup>56</sup>

That Manipur had contact with its southeastern neighbours is not disputed. There are records of trade and commerce with Burma in the royal chronicles. Manipur, in many

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<sup>50</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* pp 134 -135.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid p.137.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.p.130.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.p.120

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.p.142.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.p.168

ways also resembled the Irrawaddy region of Burma in its geographical location.<sup>57</sup> However, what is interesting is that while Burma had adopted the religion of the Buddha, the Meiteis had accepted Hinduism. The reason for this difference has been an unanswered question. The possible reason for the Meitei king's preference of Hinduism over Buddhism will be analyzed subsequently.

Even though Hinduism was practiced in Assam since the early period, during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries there was an emergence of a new understanding of Hinduism. This particular period has been called as the "revival of Vaishnavism in Assam" by many scholars.<sup>58</sup> The new web of Vaishnavism in Assam was promulgated by Sankar Deb and Madhab Deb. This neo-Vaishnava sect had attained remarkable dimensions in the seventeenth century during the reign of the Ahom ruler Sudra Singh. It was under Sudra Singh that Hinduism also became the dominant religion and the Ahoms or those who persisted in holding to their old beliefs and tribal customs came to be regarded as a separate and degraded class. Sudra Singh honored Auniati Gasain as his spiritual preceptor. Johnstone also gives a point regarding the wave of Hinduism in Assam, "once I remember a village in Assam where caste was unknown thirty five years ago, but where now the people live in the odour of sanctity as highly orthodox and bigoted Hindoos."<sup>59</sup>

Besides the rulers of Assam, Hinduism also began to be adopted by the rulers of other neighbouring states. In Cachar, the ruler, Krishna Chandra came to adopt it officially in 1790. However Gait was of the opinion that Hinduism had already been propagated even earlier among the royal families and in the courts.<sup>60</sup> This seems very plausible since all the Cachari kings possessed Hindu names from the early 15<sup>th</sup> century such as Nar Narayan, Bhim Dharpa, Indra Ballabh, Bir Darpa Narayan and so on.

The adoption of Hinduism by Manipur's rulers seems to have been linked to geo-strategic reasons and the problems it had with Burma. Burma began to follow an expansionist policy from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which came to affect Manipur. The Pagan kingdom that had unified Burma had declined by the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century and had been followed by the fragmentation of the country, yet again. It was under the Pagan rulers that

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<sup>57</sup> Hodson. op.cit. *The Meitheis*.p.21

<sup>58</sup> Gait E.A, *A History Of Assam*, Thacker Spink and Co. Calcutta, 1906.p.57

<sup>59</sup> Johnstone.Op.cit.pp.88-89.

<sup>60</sup> Gait..op.citp.251

Theravada Buddhism had also been adopted by most of the country. It was however under the Konbaung dynasty (1752-1885) that there was a re-unification of the country and attempts at expansion. The Konbaung Dynasty was, according to Victor Liberman “...the most administratively penetrating and commercially sophisticated in the history of the western mainland”.<sup>61</sup> The Konbaung rulers, threatened by China and Siam on their eastern and northern borders began following an expansionist policy to their west. Alaungpaya, for instance, started marching his armies and carried out raids steadily towards the west, to the very borders of an expansionist British India. The first major invasion of Manipur by Alaungpaya was in 1758 creating havoc on the small kingdom and was followed by an even larger and more devastating invasion in 1764. Regarding that event according to Thant Myint U “Thousands of Manipuris were forcibly deported to the Burmese capital and the combination of war, flight, and deportation left Manipur virtually empty for years”.<sup>62</sup>

From the late 18<sup>th</sup> century until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Meitei kingdom had many occasions to defend the country against raids and invasions by the Burmese. It was these circumstances that required them to seek an alliance to protect themselves against Burmese incursions. In fact, the Manipuri ruler had desired to obtain an alliance with British East India Company as early as the 1760s. However, the alliance was not achieved until after the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1824. The relationship between Manipur and British will be discussed briefly later on in the thesis.

Besides the alliance with the British, Manipur rulers also made attempts to build alliances with Assam and Cachar. Garibniwas, for instance, ordered the road leading to the land of *mayangs* (the term ‘mayang’ was used by the Meiteis to indicate the people who came from the west of Manipur like Cachar or Assam) be repaired and it was done.<sup>63</sup> Francis Hamilton, who undertook a survey of Eastern India, which he carried out from 1798 to 1814 also gave an account that roads to Manipur through Assam and Cachar were good enough to travel from Sylhet in just fifteen days.<sup>64</sup> *Cheitharol Kumbaba* recorded frequent visit of *mayang* princes to the Meitei court. And it is perhaps these occasions of

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<sup>61</sup> Liberman, Victor *Strange Parallels Southeast Asia in Global Context, c 800-1830. Vol 1.* Cambridge University Press. New York. p.87

<sup>62</sup> Thant Myint U. *The Making of Modern Burma.* Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 2004. p.15

<sup>63</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba Vol-1.* p 165

<sup>64</sup> Acharyya. op.cit. p. 53

building connections that led to the growing influence of Hinduism. In fact, T. C. Hodson had written that after becoming the prey of the Burmese force under Alaungpaya, Hinduism had moved on with increasing rapidity in Manipur.<sup>65</sup> Such networks were also made through matrimonial alliances, which definitely led to religious influences. The matrimonial alliances with *mayangs* are also mentioned in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. For instance, it was recorded,

“Wednesday, the princess married the mayang king’s son and was escorted to her husband. All the royal men and women born in Ningthem’s family made a toast of *yu* (liquor) to the princess married to the mayang king’s son”<sup>66</sup>

Similarly, Francis Hamilton mentions that the Swarga Devas or kings of Assam had many matrimonial alliances with the kings of Manipur.<sup>67</sup>

The alliances between Meitei kings and Assam and Cachar are visible from the royal chronicles of Manipur and a text called *Bhagyachandra Charitra*. From this period, Assam and Cachar had become a place of refuge for the Meitei kings, members of the royal family and nobles when their country was devastated by the Burmese invasion. The Ava invasion to Manipur mentioned above is also mentioned in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. For instance, during Chingthangkomba or Bhagyachandra’s reign, Manipur was invaded by Ava and the whole kingdom was devastated. King Chingthangkomba along with the Maharani fled to the land of *mayang* and stayed at Tekhao (term used for Assam by the Meiteis at the time).<sup>68</sup> Chingthangkomba marched from Tekhao with an eighty thousand strong army to take back his kingdom from Ava. The king of Tekhao also presented six elephants to him.<sup>69</sup> There are frequent entries in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* regarding the emissaries from the land of *mayangs* visiting Meitei courts. It is recorded that, “the mayang emissaries led by Aakhur Tao arrived at court”.<sup>70</sup> During the great ‘Seven Years Devastation of Manipur’, the king of Manipur and his people were given shelter in Assam

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<sup>65</sup> Op.cit.Hodson, *The Meitheis*, . p.118.

<sup>66</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba Vol-1*.pp 157-158

<sup>67</sup> Acharyya,op.cit. p.52

<sup>68</sup> Saroj Nalini Arambam Parratt.*The Court Chronicle of the king of Manipur: Cheitharol KumpapaVol-2, 1764- 1843*.Cambridge University Press India Ltd. New Delhi.2009.pp.1-2,

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.p.12

<sup>70</sup> Ibid p.15



and Cachar.<sup>71</sup> This explains the drive of Meitei kings to propagate Hinduism and why Hinduism became more acceptable in the valley of Manipur every time after the Burmese occupation of Manipur. Gangumei also believed that Meitei's alleged Aryan connection was to gain respectability in the Hindu world, especially among the royal families of Northeast India and Southeast Asia.<sup>72</sup>

### **3.4 Conflict between traditional faith and the new**

It is very apparent that the position of the immigrant Brahmin was made superior in the court of the Meitei rulers. They also began to perform the rituals that were earlier performed by the maibas/maibis, the Meitei priests. Until the time of the introduction of Hinduism, the maibas and maibis were the chief advisers to the king besides performing Meitei rituals. The gurus (i.e. the name given to the immigrant Hindu priests) instead began to inaugurate the places like markets, administrative buildings, and also the new villages, which were earlier done only by the king. During Garibniwas's reign, on the full moon *Bamons* ('brahmins') were made to attend ritual ceremonies (no particular name of the ceremony is given) at the palace and they were allowed to perform the appeasement rites. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* has recorded an incident where the king Garibniwas even bowed down before a guru. The incident is recorded as, "19<sup>th</sup> Saturday, as the Guru went and reached the area of Kwairakpam, Ningthem ('king') bowed down before him and returned". The sentence is cryptic, but from the reference, it is clear that the Gurus had attained some position, which the Meitei maichous (they are also maibas/maibis) never achieved before.

Later, during the reign of king Chingthangkomba, the royal pool was inaugurated by Guru Shanti Das which was named Patda Sagar and a market at Sanlungthen was inaugurated by a guru (name not mentioned). The establishment of a distinctive administrative body for the new religion under an immigrant Hindu was also seen for the first time under Chingthangkomba. It is recorded as,

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<sup>71</sup> Bijoykumar.op.cit..p.74

<sup>72</sup> Kabui.op.cit. *Glimpses of Land and People of Ancient Manipur*.p.4

“22<sup>nd</sup> Sat, the king ordered that the administration over all the servants of Sundra Govindaji, the servants of Ramji and Mahaballi were to be dealt with Thakur Nabananda and he was given the supervision of these temple attendants.”<sup>73</sup>

With the acceptance of Hinduism, the appointments of gurus (brahmins) as a preceptor to the king increased, and the influence of the traditional priest and priestesses was greatly reduced. We may consequently expect that there was a conflict between these representatives of the traditional faith and those of the new on a political as well as religious level.

However, the process of Hinduization was never a smooth process. It is quite natural that there was some opposition to the process of Hinduization and there is evidence to that effect too. During the period of Garibniwas, it is recorded that on “Tuesday, *Phairen*, the locality of brahmins called Bamon lane was set on fire and one Bamon was burnt to death.”<sup>74</sup> It is not an easy conclusion that the setting of fire at the royal palace and temples were the form of protest against the new religion, but it is also a point of argument that cannot be totally denied. Those who ignored the order of the king were all sent to the villages in the country. There are frequent entries for such incidents meted out to those who defied the king’s order along with those who received punishment for stealing, murdering or any kind of anti-social activities, being sent to the outskirts of Manipur. Such groups were referred to *asloi thaba* (*loi* meaning ‘exile’ and *thaba* meaning ‘send’) in Meitei according to these chronicles and such groups existed from very early on. However, from the period of Garibniwas, the records for *loi thaba* became frequent in the chronicles. They were mostly sent to the place called Sugunu and Kakching. From the chronicles, we are also informed that there was a huge resentment among the maichous, who were earlier the Meitei scholars and also the advisor of the king. It is recorded,

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<sup>73</sup> Parratt op.cit.. *Cheitharol Kumbaba Vol-1*.p.116

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.p.143

“In the month of Yinga, the new *Konok* Chantrashekhon, who was on his way to Tekhao (Assam), was murdered by Haorongpam Maichou at Torbung near Khukha and most of the nobles were fined and punished”<sup>75</sup>

This shows that the newly coming groups of brahmins were not welcomed and were resented since the new group of brahmins were threatening their positions and were being occupied by them. The punishment of the group of nobles also can mean that the murder was not a personal enmity and was some sort of plan executed by the group of nobles who resented the new wave of Hinduism.

### **3.5 Patronizing Hinduism: From Chingthangkomba/Bhagyachandra to Chandrakirti, 1764-1886**

As we have seen in the previous section, Hinduism was introduced in Manipur in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Garibniwas had taken up strong measures to propagate the new religion. However, forcible conversion is often not successful and it needs certain strategies to make the people accept a new religion. One of the strategies was to create myths and legends linking the traditional faith with Hinduism. Further more, the patronage of cultural activities, it is well known, was a kingly duty. A large part of the king’s appeal to his nobility and his subjects’ loyalty depended on his personal charisma. The patronage of art and culture at the court was also an instrument of rule. Such patronage was a matter of magnificence and pomp, which reflected power. It increased the esteem of a ruler. Thus, the patronage of art and culture served a political function as well.<sup>76</sup> In this section, we will turn to the various ways in which the rulers of Manipur used Hindu religious material to enhance their own status within society.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.p.150

<sup>76</sup> Ebba Koch, *The Hierarchical Principles of Shah-Jahani Painting, Mughal Art and Imperial Ideology: Collected Essays*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 130-131

### a) Construction of temples

It was during Charairongba's rule that Tari, the *Hanchapa* of the smiths was said to have made a mould to cast an image of Panthoibi.<sup>77</sup> According to the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, Charairongba constructed several temples of Meitei deities like the goddess Panthoibi (Panthoibi *murti*, *murti* is a Sanskritic term for 'image' and this was the first time it in *Cheitharol Kumbaba*). This was the first record of an image of a Meitei ancestral divinity being cast. The Meiteis traditionally did not usually have any images for worship, nor were they idol worshipers. Such forms of worship can be explained as the influence of the idol worship in Hinduism. It was also for the first time that it was recorded that the temple of the goddess Kali was built. It was thus recorded, "1628 Sak, The month of Yingen began on Tuesday and on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> Yingen, the temple of Kali was begun to be built". Further, it was reported that in the year, "1629 Sak on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> of Kalen, they began to build the temple of Vishnu."<sup>78</sup>

Garibniwas also constructed a large number of temples while also being engaged in a fanatic action of destruction of images of the traditional faith like *umanglais* and other important deities. The *Cheitharol Lambuba* gives the reference as, "7<sup>th</sup> Langpan, it was declared that nine *Umang lais*, two *lammapi lais* were not to be regarded as *lais* and all their shrines were demolished."<sup>79</sup> Further on 1648 Sak, in the month of *Yingen*, *Laiyingthau Panthoibi*, *Laiwa Haipa* and two *Lammapis*, *Soraren*, *Hoiton Pokpi*, these several *lais* were smashed. In one incident the temple of Hanuman was constructed where there had been a shrine of *Panthoibi* earlier. After Garibniwas's reign, there is an absence of regular records regarding the Hinduization in Manipur on a massive scale through the use of force. Instead, according to Parratt, the period after Garibniwas was a disturbed period in the country, not because of religious turmoil, but due to the various attacks by the Burmese as mentioned in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.

After Garibniwas, Hinduism came to flourish under Chingthangkhomba (1764-1798). Chingthangkhomba ruled for thirty-four years and the period was a great landmark in the history of Manipur, in his war of liberation against the Burmese and propagation of Hinduism. His deep religious devotion earned him the title of Rajarshi

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<sup>77</sup> Parratt. Op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. p.109.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p.127

Bhagyachandra ('Royal Saint'). His great contribution included the building of Govindaji temple and the introduction of *Ras Leela* (a dance form which is a combination of the traditional Meitei dance forms and themes in Hinduism). According to the *Bhagyachandra Charitra*, once, Krishna appeared in his dream and instructed the raja to construct his image from the wood of a jackfruit tree from Kaina hill. Accordingly, the sculpture of Krishna was made by the king himself, in the royal temple and the *Ras Leela* was then performed for the first time in 1769.<sup>80</sup> In this dance ceremony, he portrayed himself as Krishna and the queen as Radha.<sup>81</sup> Further, it was also stated that Chingthang khomba began to beg and continued for seven days even as it was believed that Jaganath Prabhu had reached him in his dream and told him to do so.<sup>82</sup>

The temple of Govindaji became a central religious institution in Manipur from that time onwards, and it is still a central religious institution among the Meitei Hindus. The emergence of Govindaji temple as a central religious institution could be seen as an attempt to resolve the above-mentioned conflicts between Meitei priests and Hindu priests. Govindaji was a new institution, which was established as the manifestation of the king's dream. The king in this way now became the only messenger of the gods. Here neither brahmin nor maiba could dictate the state in regard to the worshipping of this deity, only the king alone exercised full authority. Texts like *Shamuphaba Amasung Shri Govindaji Nirupon* ('Capturing of the wild elephant and installation of Shri Govindaji's idol') and *Bhagyachandra Charitra* mention that he dedicated his kingdom to ShriGovindaji and he ruled in his name. His devotion to Vaishnavism led to the development of many legends around him. *Bhagyachandra Charit* and *Shamu Phaba amasung Shri Govindaji Nirupon* tell the story of how Bhagyachandra miraculously captured a wild elephant while he was in exile in the Assam with the blessings of Lord Vishnu who was said to have given him his vision.

During Ghambir Singh's reign (1826-1833), the public audience of the king with the image of Govinda became very prominent.<sup>83</sup> After Chingthangkhomba, Manipur was again in chaos because of internal conflicts over the throne followed by several raids by

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<sup>80</sup> Bandhopadhyay, op.cit.p.141.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.p10

<sup>83</sup> Several incidents are recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* regarding the public audience of king and the image of Govindaji.

the Burmese kingdom of Ava, which eventually led to “Seven years of devastation”. After having such a long period of instability and suffering under the Avas, Ghambir Singh brought prosperity to the country. He performed an expiation rite for the period Ava had ruled the country. It is recorded in the *Cheitharol Kumbabathat*,

“King and idol of Govindaji took a day long procession in the valley. All the people men and women, boys and girls offered whatever each of them could afford, and whatever they possessed, showering handful of flowers with tears in their eyes. The procession was received with the singing of religious songs to the beating of drums and clashing of cymbals, the strewing of sweet-scent flowers, the burning of incense and offering of fire.”<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, all the priests of the land received the dust of Govindaji’s feet with devotion.<sup>85</sup> This event can be seen as a setting the belief that all the evils that were going on in the country (due to Burmese occupation) needed a psychological reset. And the country was re-organized only through the blessing from Govindaji. Here, it is clear that Ghambir, in defeating the Burmese after seven years of occupying Manipur could now revel in that glory and associate the kingship with Lord Vishnu. Thus behind the tendentious dramaturgy, recurrent themes of the appearance of the Hindu deities in the dreams of the kings (which frequently happened to Chingthangkomba) and state rituals (e.g. expiation rite) lay the conjunction of ideas that infused divine power with the kings. This association of the Meitei king with Lord Vishnu served to underline the Raja’s function as protector of the realm. The king and the idol of Govindaji became more and more inseparable, and there were examples of divine retribution. Thus, once, as the tribes of Montha refused to offer a basket of rice to Govindaji when they were asked, their whole village was devastated. Even today, most of the important festivals in Manipur like Holi, Rathajatra and Janmashtami centre on Govindaji.

One of the most interesting elements of the period was the creation of the mythical creature of *kanglasha* (an image that combined the dragon and lion), now the

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<sup>84</sup> Parratt.Op.cit..*Cheitharol Kumbaba Vol-2*. p.97.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid

symbol of Meitei identity, which stood in front of the west gate of Kangla. The *Cheitharol Kumbaba* records the construction of the *kanglashas* in Saka Era 1726 (1804 A.D) during the reign of Maharaja Chourjit. However, Johnstone has a different view regarding those who built these two *kanglashas*. He said,

“About the year 1250 A.D, a large Chinese force invaded the country, and was signally defeated; all who were not killed being made prisoners... a number of them were settled at Susa Rameng (Kameng) in the valley, where they still have descendants. The Chinese also taught the art of brick making and erected two solid blocks of masonry in the palace between which the road to the Lion Gate passed”<sup>86</sup>

The Burmese destroyed the two fabulous statues of the two *Kanglashas* during the “Seven Years of Devastation” of Manipur, which was ended with the help of the British in the First Anglo Burmese War in 1826. It is said that it was rebuilt by Ghambir Singh during his prosperous reign.<sup>87</sup>

The concept of the mythical creature and what it referred to is another important feature, which I would like to look into. In general, any work of art is conceived through inspiration and imagination. There might be different interpretations for this mythical creature, but it is possible to observe it as a symbol of sovereignty. As mentioned above, after Chingthangkomba, Manipur was again in chaos because of internal conflicts over the throne followed by several raids by Ava, which eventually led to “Seven Years of Devastation”. After having such a long period of instability and cruelty under the Avas, Ghambir Singh brought prosperity in the country and indeed, the sovereignty of this small country was recognized even by the British. At the time Ghambir Singh reasserted the authority of Manipur over various tribes on hills and reduced them to submission, including Kohima. At Kohima, he was said to have stood upon a stone and had his footprints set up in a prominent position together with an upright stone carved with

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<sup>86</sup> Johnstone.op.cit.p.89

<sup>87</sup> Ibid

dragon insignia and an inscription.<sup>88</sup> So it is possible to see this creation of mythical structure as a symbol of glorifying the age and power of the king.

The stories of achievements of the Meitei kings and their associations with Govindaji had been continued and cemented in the mind of the people of the Manipur people, that he was the only messenger of the god and highest priest. According to Hodson, the king was the religious head in Manipur.<sup>89</sup> McCulloch remarks that “the Raja, brahmins, and the members of the royal family, gives the sacred thread indiscriminately, but to receive it from the raja and to become his disciple seems to be the preferred method.”<sup>90</sup> Johnstone also said, “Raja was assumed by his people greater than the High pundit and a man belonging to a hill tribe preferred Raja as their priest in the process of their conversion into Hindu.”<sup>91</sup>

#### **b) Creation Of Hindu Oriented Myth**

Hindu ideology also spread in Manipur like any other state by producing texts and creation of local myths. One such myth created by brahmins in order to relate the Meiteis and the Hinduism was the giving of a new name Manipur. Manipur was called by various names before the process of Hinduization. It was called Poirei, Meitrabak or Kangleipak by the people of this land. It was known by different names to its neighbours. It was called Kathe by the Burmese, Meklee by the Assamese, Moglie by the Cachari and Cassey by the Shans. The brahmins named it Manipur and a myth was created linking it to the Hindu epic, Mahabharata. According to this myth, the valley of Manipur was flooded with water towards the end of the *satya yuga*. Lord Mahadeva was in search for a place for a divine dance with his consort and they found Manipur, But the valley was flooded, and all they could see was the tip of the Nongmaiching hill (abode of the traditional deities Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi). Mahadeva stood on this hill and dug a hole with his *trishul*, a trident and drained the water. Thus, the valley came into existence, and dance was performed in which all the gods from the three regions of the

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<sup>88</sup> Parratt.op.cit. *Cheitharol Kaumbaba Vol-2..*p100 and Johnstone.p.42

<sup>89</sup> Hodson.op.cit. *The Meitheis*.p.29

<sup>90</sup> Ibid p.84.

<sup>91</sup> Johnstone.op.cit.p.88.



universe participated. According to this story, the dance performed was the first *Lai Haraoba* (Pleasing of the gods). These gods offered many jewels to the land. Ananta took out his gem from his head and gave it to the land and the land was covered with jewels. Thus, it came to be known as Manipur, meaning the land of the jewels. Gangumei aptly pointed out that the adoption of the name Manipur for this ancient kingdom was the beginning of the process of Sanskritisation initiated by its conversion to Hinduism. According to *Sanamahi Laikan*, this name was given by Shantidas during Garibaniwas' reign.<sup>92</sup>

During the period of Chandrakirti (1850-1886) there was a significant development of literature and several texts were written such as the *Garibniwas Charit*, *Bhagyachandra Charit*, *Bijay Panchali*, *Khaki Gnamba* etc. Texts like *Garibniwas Charit*, *Bhagyachandra* and *Bijay Panchalim* maintained and imprinted on Meitei population that Meitei kings were created from the flesh of Lord Vishnu. All such texts, Hindu oriented, must have helped in the dissemination of Hinduism in Manipur. In fact, Sruti Bandhopadyaya said that these texts helped Hinduism to enter into an alien society and culture.<sup>93</sup> Public reading of these texts helped Hinduism in reaching out to the illiterate masses. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* has recorded many occasions of reciting of the Bhagavata Purana. The first instance was recorded during king Chingthangkhomba. Such reciting of puranas was organized on many occasions like social gatherings, during festivals, and so on. This tradition of reciting *puranas* is still continuing in Manipur, and it is called *wari liba* which means "telling a story".

The drive of the Hindu oriented myth was so powerful that by the period of Chandrakirti, most of the Meitei population in Manipur believed and started identifying themselves as the descendants of Arjun (Prince of Mahabharata) and being Hindu since time immemorial. Johnstone also narrated in his book *Manipur and Naga Hill* that Meitei claimed themselves as a descendant of Arjun. According to the myth, Chitrabhanu was the king of Manipur when the Pandavas were in roaming in exile in the forest. He had a daughter called Chitrangada who married Arjun, the third Pandava, when he came to Manipur for pilgrimage and bore a son called Babhrubahana who became the king of

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<sup>92</sup>*Sanamahi Laikan*.p.4

<sup>93</sup>Sruti Bandhopadyaya, *Dance: The tools of Sanskritisation Process in Manipur*. p.4

Manipur after Chitrabhanu.<sup>94</sup> *Garibniwas Charitra* mentions how Arjun dies at the hands of his son Babhrubahana and how Babhrubahana, at the behest of his mother, went to the underworld, got the necessary gem to revive Arjun by defeating the snakes and brought back his father from death.<sup>95</sup> The text says the cave at Kangla is the path through which Babhrubahana went to the underworld.<sup>96</sup>

### c) Ceremonies and festivals

It was under Garibniwas that the conversion was carried out by force while the traditional old beliefs and culture were set to be eliminated. This new form of beliefs and religion was definitely protested by certain groups of the population by burning down the temple or even by killing the brahmins. Chingthangkhomba realized the conflict and he re-established the old faith again, and they were maintained together. He started observing both Hindu deities and the traditional old faith. It is recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* that Chingthangkhomba cast an image of Sanamahi and the king, queen and most of the ladies of the royal household offered fruits to Sanamahi.<sup>97</sup> It says that in 1783, on the 5th of Hiyangei (October/ November), Saturday, *lai* Govinda, Sanamahi and others, and all the *lais* of the land were made to bathe in the Lamlongei pond.<sup>98</sup> From his time onwards Hinduism always goes together with Meitei culture and ceremonies. Chingthangkhomba transformed the art of singing and dancing of traditional old Meitei dance into the Vaishnavism content, which is called *Nat Pala or Nat Samkritana*. Chingthangkhomba is accepted as the guru of *Nat Pala*.<sup>99</sup> *Nat Pala* was exclusively formed to worship Govindaji at the temple of the palace. Chingthangkhomba had meticulously devised the songs and dances only for the propagation of Krishna.

Chingthangkhomba introduced *Ras Leela*, the form of dance where Radha and Krishna is the theme but the form of movement is the traditional way of dancing. Gangumei Kabui stated that the Manipuri Hinduism was adapted to suit the local taste

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<sup>94</sup>Johnstone.op.cit.p.75

<sup>95</sup>L Mangi Singh and L Mani Singh. *Garibniwas Charit*. Mahabharat Press, Imphal. 1967.p.28.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid

<sup>97</sup>Parratt.op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba Vol-2*.p p.11, 31,

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.p.15

<sup>99</sup>Bandhopadhyay.op.cit.p.141.

and ideas.<sup>100</sup> The indigenous Meitei gods and goddesses were identified with that of Hindus like Soraren with Indra, Nongpok Ningthau with Shiva, Panthoibi with Durga or Parvati and Wangbaren with Varuna. Further, the traditional Meitei festivals are now identified with Hindu festivals like *Heigru Hitongda* festival was renamed as *Jal Yatra*, Ahong Khongching as *Rathra Jatra* and many others. The festival of *Holi*, for the first time, is mentioned in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* during the period of Chingthangkomba (1764-1798). The coin of the Manipur kingdom had a word *Sri*.<sup>101</sup> Unless permitted by the king various articles of dress and ornaments could not be worn and permission to wear any of these articles and dresses was much coveted.<sup>102</sup> Further, since the Meiteis started observing the Hindu festivals like Holi, Rathajatra and Diwali, it was necessary to find some ways by which the festival or the day on which business was sacrilege should be observed. And it had to be kept track of in order to insure that the proper festival should be celebrated upon it. As it is said, holidays were at first genuinely holy days, and a calendar grew up around them. The Meiteis thus might have followed the system to measure not only the position of the stars and so to tell the time by the clock of the universe but also the force of that mysterious power of luck which the star cast. Thus the wave of Hinduism developed the rudiments of astronomy, and the study of astronomy strengthened the superstition and faith of Hinduism in Manipur.

The Hindu calendar used in ancient times had undergone many changes in the process of regionalization, and today there are several regional Indian calendars. It seems the Meitei calendar is also related to the Hindu calendar as cast in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. From *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, it is very evident that the Meitei calendar has 12 months namely *Sachipu*, *Kalen*, *Yinga*, *Yingen*, *Thawan*, *Langpan*, *Mera*, *Hiyangkei*, *Poinu*, *Wakching*, *Phairen* and *Lamta*. The Meitei calendar starts in mid-April, and also the first day of the calendar is celebrated as the traditional New Year, on a similar day with the calendar in Mithila, Assam, Kerala, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Tripura and West Bengal. Further, the point that helps us in propagating the argument that the Meitei calendar was influenced by Hindu calendar is that the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* records the

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<sup>100</sup>Kabui.Op.cit. *History of Manipur Vol-1*.p.279

<sup>101</sup>Hodson op.cit.. *The Meitheis*.p.37

<sup>102</sup> Ibid .p.13.

days of Sankranti of every month since the time of Garibniwas and the day of Vishu Sankranti (which is a beginning of the year in the Malayalam calendar in Kerala).

Another change brought by the Hinduism was on the part of rites and rituals associated with various stages of life. On the sixth day after a baby is born, there is a ritual ceremony called *Swasthi Puja*. When the child reaches the age of three years, *Karnabhed* ceremony is performed. A ceremony on the thirteenth day, *Shradha* has been added to the rituals pertaining to death ceremonies. *Asthi sanchaya* is observed on the sixth day of the death in which the bone or ashes of the deceased are collected to be immersed in the Ganga or some other sacred site. The anniversary of death called *phiroy* is also observed. All these rites are conducted by the brahmins. Apart from these ceremonies, brahmins are required in other religious ceremonies too. Singing of *kirtana* and recital from the *Bhagavata Purana* are intrinsic to all the religious ceremonies. Every *leikaior* locality started having a temple, and a brahmin family serves the temple. Thus they managed to penetrate deep into the life of the Meiteis.

At the same time pilgrimage to the Hindu holy places became a practice. A number of the members of the royal household including princess went to Ganges for pilgrimage under escort of the brahmin priest. The first reference regarding the pilgrimage to Ganga is when Bamon Kesok and Horinaran led a group of people to immerse themselves in the river Ganga on 3<sup>rd</sup> of Lamta, Monday, 1657 Sak.<sup>103</sup> Further, it is also recorded that, “On 22<sup>nd</sup> of Wakching, Sunday (1659 Sak) few Bamons and princes [names not mentioned] went to immerse themselves in the river Ganga”.<sup>104</sup> The practice of immersing the forehead skull of the cremated person was also followed. The *Cheitharol Kumbaba* records that the king exhumed the bones of his ancestors and they had been cremated on the bank of Ningthi River, the choice of location was presumably in order that the ashes could then be scattered upon the water. According to the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, it was from this time that cremation became the customary method of disposal of the dead. As part of the brahmin’s efforts, cremation of death body became a customary method of the disposal of the dead. According to *Sakok-Lamlan puya*, prior to Hinduism, there were four methods of disposal of dead bodies among Meiteis- the

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<sup>103</sup> Parratt.op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba Vol-2..p.18*

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.p.23

*Nungshitki Potloi* ('left in open air'), the *Esingee Potloi* ('immersed in water'), *Leipaki Potloi* ('burial') and *Meigee Potloi* ('cremation'). However, most common among them was a burial. It has been recorded in Cheitarol Kumbaba, "*Ningthem*(king), after having exhumed the bones of most of his ancestors, left for Ningthi River (Chindwin) to cremate them. The practice of cremating the dead body began at this period throughout the land."<sup>105</sup>

The rituals and ceremonies performed by Meiteis were directed towards the welfare, not of any one place or party, but of the land and people as a whole, added symbolic substance of one-ness among various clans of Meiteis. The structural infirmity of fragmented clans of Meiteis was dominated by unifying power of social and cultural institution under Hinduism. Hinduism served as the most essential craft of consolidating his monarchical power in the newly emerging socio-political turmoil of the period. Now, through Hinduism, the Meiteis crafted a new respectable genealogy. According to Hodson, it is through the festival and outward ritual that Meiteis are all exclusively Hindu. It was through Hinduism that Meitei kings made an effort to develop a set of mythology to form the identity of land, people, and territory.

The process of Hinduisation in Manipur had certain similarities with that of Assam in few aspects. Assam under Koch's king also initiated building temples in various part of the kingdom. One of the famous temple in Assam is Kamakhya Madir (believed to be build by Koch king Naranarayan and Chilarai) in Gauhati, writing new genealogy of the ruling cast (giving Aryan origin), changing of names e.g. Garibniwas's name before covnerting into Hindu was Paikhomba. Similarly, Koch chief Bisu changed his name as Bisva Simha who claimed to be a son of lord Shiva. Historians like Bhattacharjee, Nath, Rahaman and Rup Kumar suggested that there are few common features in the process of legitimization of political power in pre-colonial state formation in Northeast India such as the construction of the idea of divine kingship, the building of religious institution and most importantly use of "Indo-Aryan" culture including language and literature.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> J B Bhattacharjee, Pan-Indian Culture Continuum and early State in North East India. D. Nath, State Formation in the Peripheral Areas: A Study of the Chutiya Kingdom of the Brahmaputra Valley, Md. Shah Noorur Rahaman, The Emergence of the Koch State in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, In *Early State in North East India* (edt) J B Bhattacharjee and D r Syiemlieh. Regency Publication and Astral International Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi. 2013.

In Manipur, court ceremonies and Hindu festivals like Holi, Rathajatra and Janmashtami are centered on Govindaji. Syncretization of Hindu rituals and ceremonies with the Meitei rituals helped Hinduism firmly establish its root in the land. These popular festivals still pull the massive attention of audiences in Manipur including other tribes and Muslims. Making of temples of Govindaji, the use of performing art, Ras Leela, singing of *kirtan*, which had become a popular culture, could be seen as a strategy for mass indoctrination among the Meiteis. All the Hindu festivals patronized by the kings were a powerful cultural project for mass Hinduisation.

### 3.6 Brahmin Sabha

The state had several departments called *Loishangs* or 'Services' for the smooth functioning of the administration. Each *loishang* incorporated a number of posts. The functions of these posts were delineated in a text called *Lioyumba Sinyen* ('Loiyumba's distribution of duties'). After the adoption of Hinduism, a formal organization had become necessary to regulate the norms of socio-religious observances of the newly Hinduized society and also to resolve conflicts arising out of these. This must have led to the formation of Brahma Sabha, an apex body of the brahmins in Manipur. This was formed during Gambhir Singh's reign (1826-1838).<sup>107</sup> The formation of this body can be traced to the setting up of an institute of the brahmins called the *Bamon Loishang* (Brahmin's House). The *Bamon Loishang* was set up during the period of Garibaniwas.<sup>108</sup> Thus, we come across references in the royal chronicle to *Bamon Hanjaba* (an official under the *Bamon Loishang*) for the first time in 1716.<sup>109</sup> It eventually evolved into a body called *Pancharatan* or the five jewels, consisting of five learned Brahmins, during the reign of king Bhagyachandra (1763-1798). It was first

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Roop Kumar Burma, State Formation, Legitimization and Cultural Changes: A study of Koch Kingdom, in *The NEHU Journal, Vol-XII, Vol-1. (January-June) 2014*.

<sup>107</sup> (ed) Singh, L. Ibungohal and Singh. N. Khelchandra. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. Manipur Sahitya Parisad. Imphal 2005..p.228.

<sup>108</sup> (ed) Sharma, A. Chitreshwor, Sharma, B. Kullachandra and N. Ibochouba. *Origin and Migration of the Manipuri Brahmins*, Chingtam Press, Imphal, 1995, p.4.

<sup>109</sup> Ibungohal Singh and Khelchandra Singh, Op.cit. pp.123 and 125

mentioned in the royal chronicle in the year 1796.<sup>110</sup> The names of the posts under this body were Vidyalankara, Vidyanidhi, Vidyasundara, Bachaspati and Vidyathakura.<sup>111</sup> This was again enlarged to form a body of nine learned brahmins called *Navaratan* or the 'nine jewels' during Chourajit's reign (1803-1813). To the existing five *ratnas*, four new *ratnas* called Vidyavargisha, Tarkalankara, Bamon Hanjaba and Bamon Hidang are added. According to Dr. M.Kirti, this body consisted of brahmin specialists in the field of *nyaya*, jurisprudence, *gyotish* and theology.<sup>112</sup> The *Cheitharol Kumpaba* mentions the inauguration of the *Bamon Loishang* building in 1804.<sup>113</sup> This body came to be known as Brahma Sabha Gambhir Singh's period (1825-1838). The earliest reference to Brahma Sabha occurs in the *Cheitharol Kumpaba* in 1831. It is mentioned that "On the first of *Shajibu* (March/April), Wednesday, Maharaj Chinglen Nongdren Khomba (Gambhir Singh), along with Yuvaraja, the Brahmin Sabha and all the other nobles of the land gathered and sat at Sri Govindaji's *mandapa* to listen to the reading of a text called *Laghu Jyotish Candrika* prepared by Sri Khumbong Debakishore, the *Panji Sanglakpa*."<sup>114</sup>

The importance of this body in the court can be accessed from a reference in the royal chronicle to the creation of the post of *Vyavasthakari* in 1840 in the month of Wakching (December/ January). It says, "On the 17th, Sunday, on the occasion of appointing Sri Laipubam Thakur Hanjaba by the king as the *Vyavasthakari* in the court, where all the nine *ratans* and the ministers of the state were present, nine gunshot was presented to make a formal salute to him."<sup>115</sup> The Brahma Sabha consisted of many officials with the king as the head. All the proceedings were conducted in front of the king. He appointed the brahmins to the posts and his decision was final.

### 3.7 Social stratification

The introduction of Hinduism as a state religion brought many social and cultural changes in the Meitei society. The seven clans of the Meitei fold were all given Hindu

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid

<sup>111</sup> (ed)Sharma, A. Chitreshwor and Sharma, Kullachandra, and Singh, Ibochouba. Meitei Bamongi Haurakpham. Chingtam Press. Imphal. 1995. p.6

<sup>112</sup> Kirti op.cit., p.87

<sup>113</sup> Ibungohal, Khelchandra. *Op.cit.* p.184.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid p.228

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.p.257.

gotras like Ningthauja as *Shandilya*, Angom as *Kaushika*, Chenglei as *Bhardhwaja*, Luwang as *Kasyap*, Khuman as *Madhugalya*, Moirang as *Aitereya* and Khaba-Nganba as *Gautam*.<sup>116</sup> The king and all the Meteis were declared as Kshatriyas. The Meiteis became the double caste society, brahmins, and kshatriyas, after the conversion. However, the religious sensibility of unity becomes much stronger after conversion to Hinduism. There is an incident recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* that, when all the Tangkhuns from the all the mountain ranges joined together and revolted, the entire inhabitants in the plains and all the people of Lois area jointly fought them.<sup>117</sup> According to Vijayalakshmi Brara, one of the foremost tasks of Hinduism was to re-use the familiar ideology of common ancestry by making new genealogy where all the clans became descendants of Guru, a sage who is lord of Universe.<sup>118</sup> Hodson recorded the beliefs of Hindu Meiteis regarding the unity of the clans as “All the clans are descendant from Guru, a sage who is Lord of Universe. The Ningthujas were from his left eye, The Angoms from his right eyes, the Chengleis from his right ear, the Khabananbams from his left ear, the Luwangs from his right nostril, the Khumuls from his left nostril and the Moirangs from his teeth”.<sup>119</sup> Regarding the impact of Hinduism on Manipuri society, Michael W Charney assesses ( by citing Victor B. Lieberman) that the ‘brahminically sanctioned changes that Garibniwas introduced ... inspired the Manipuris with a vast energy and missionary dynamism’.<sup>120</sup>

Moreover, the Hindu taboos started to have an appreciable hold in Manipur. After Hinduism had become the state religion, there were strict restrictions to killing and eating of the cow (which was a common feature before the advent of Hinduism), and it was regarded as a sin. Starting from Garibniwas’ period, there were several allusions to anti-eating of meat, rearing of cattle and so on. The first of this case is recorded as,

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<sup>116</sup> Kabui.op.cit. *History of Manipur Vol-1*. .p.256

<sup>117</sup> Parratt. *Chetharol Kumbaba*.p134.

<sup>118</sup> Brara.op.cit...p. 187

<sup>119</sup> Op.cit.Hodson. *The Meitheis*.p. 100

<sup>120</sup> Michael W. Charney, Literary Culture on the Burma-Manipur Frontier in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. In *Medieval History Journal*. Vol-14, No-2.2011



“5<sup>th</sup> *Lagpan*, Friday, Seven sagies of the keiroi who ate the flesh of the cattle were all arrested, beaten and made a public spectacle”<sup>121</sup>

In the same year, it was also recorded that the keeping of pigs and hens in the residential area was forbidden. This strict norm against killing and eating beef became more predominant in Manipur during the reign of Chandrakirti. On one occasion, a man, while carrying a dead cow dropped blood on the ground in front of prince Kotwal Koirang. The prince started beating the man until he was almost senseless.<sup>122</sup> And also Johnstone, who was political agent at Manipur, also complained about the death penalty for killing a cow.<sup>123</sup>

With the adoption of Hinduism, the social structure also underwent some changes. In Hinduism, the society is divided into four units arranged in a hierarchical order, which is called the *varna* system. In this system, the highest position is occupied by the brahmins who are followed by the kshatriyas, the vaishyas and the shudras. Theoretically one cannot change one's *varna* which is determined by birth. Thus, newly converted people had to be assigned a *varna*.

The Brahmins in Manipur also came to occupy the highest position in the social hierarchy. The position of the brahmins in society can be referred from the fact that the king Garibniwas performed a purificatory rite for the killing of a brahmin woman.<sup>124</sup> The brahmins were not exempted from the lallup system to which everyone in the kingdom was required to give free labour for 10 days out of every 40 days to the kings. However, brahmins were relaxed from any punishments as compared to the punishment given to the other section of the society. For instance, Cheitharol Kumbaba mentions that in the year 1877, on the day of Durga Puja, 16th of October, a group of five youngsters Manoharmayum (brahmins), one Adhikarimayum (brahmin), two Laishram, one Suriram misbehaved with five girls while, coming to see a festival (name of the festival not

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<sup>121</sup> Parratt.op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.123

<sup>122</sup> Johnstone.op.cit. p. 109

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.p.168

<sup>124</sup> Ibungohal and Khelchandra.op.cit.p.148

mentioned), were caught and put in the sun for five consecutive days at different market places. But the two brahmins had to sit under the shed.<sup>125</sup>

The lois and the keis, who had a fairly inferior social structure before Hinduism, were now declared outcastes. Similarly, the hill tribes and the Muslims came to be recognized as unclean by the Meiteis. The adoption of Hinduism had led to the introduction of concept like purity and pollution in Manipur. The royal chronicle mentioned that in the year 1864, on the occasion of the *Jhulan* festival, a Muslim woman was found watching the celebration at the mandapa of the Sri Govindaji's Temple. Purificatory rites had to be performed at the mandapa and also the house of the brahmin she had entered.<sup>126</sup> Another indication of hill tribes being considered impure can also be seen from an incident mentioned in *Bhagyachandra Charitra*. It states that once a hill woman was found feeding a Meitei boy. Considering that would lead to the loss of the caste of the boy, she was caught by the king's men and was brought to the court for trial.<sup>127</sup>

Thus we can see the transformation in the social structure in Manipur as compared to the period prior to Hinduization. As we have seen earlier brahmins were married to a woman belonging to the loi, kei or hill tribes, but after the Hinduization such matrimonial alliances became strictly restricted. Even marriage with the kshatriyas, except those of the royal blood, was not approved. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* recorded incidents of banishment of Meitei men for having relations with brahmin women. However, it should not be noted that such restriction did not begin immediately after the State's acceptance of Hinduism. The concept of purity and impurity had started only after the religion was firmly established, where brahmins acquired sufficient ritual authority in Manipur. As Hinduism began to be more established, the term *Hao*, which was earlier used in reference to commoner, began to be applied to a non-Hindu with a derogatory and negative implication. There is an incident where there was a contest over the post (name of the post not given) between Yirom Murari and Tamuton. Murai made the complaint that Tamuton could not be selected since he was a *Hao*.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.p.445

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.p.372

<sup>127</sup> Mangi and Mani. p.182.

<sup>128</sup> Parratt.op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*..p.72

There are a few references in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* to the practice of sati but it is mentioned only during the period of Garibniwas. It is recorded that, “7<sup>th</sup> Thursday, Bamon Narakhyan died along with his two wives” and “ Wahengpam Cha, the Nongthonba [name of the post] died. He died with two wives.”<sup>129</sup> One more incident, referring to sati, was recorded in the year 1737.<sup>130</sup> However, even though a few instances of sati are recorded, the practice of sati did not continue in Manipur.

The impact of Hinduism in Manipur was so strong that it even had an impact on the court of Ava. According to Charney, from the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, exchanges between the Manipuri and Burmese royal courts and Manipuri and Burmese activity in the Lower Chindwin increased.<sup>131</sup> Much of the activity recorded in the chronicles of either or both were diplomatic or otherwise involved intellectual exchange between royal cultures, which was mostly Sanskrit oriented. Charney further says that even the monks of Burmese royal centre at Chindwin depended upon the aid of brahmins from Manipur and Hindu ascetics in middle Chindwin townships such as Kanni for help with the Sanskrit language per se or with Sanskrit texts. Some of the mediation of literary culture among the Chindwin scholars was through religion. A major new religious force came with the Hinduization of the Manipuri court, and then moved through the Chindwin and reached all the way to the Burmese court at Ava.<sup>132</sup> Manipuri brahmins played a significant role in shaping the perspectives of and cooperating in the literary activities of Chindwin-based Buddhist scholars and laypeople. The impact on Manipur of these religious changes can be overestimated, but the effect they had on the Lower Chindwin may have been dramatic in more tangible ways. Manipur was already a significant route for the introduction of Sanskrit works into Burma, as Charney has said.

### 3.8 Conclusion

It is clear that the arrival and settlement of brahmins in Manipur had started in earlier centuries. However, there is hardly any evidence of any incident of giving them special

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<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*p.143.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*p.146

<sup>131</sup> Michael W. Charney, *Literary Culture on the Burma-Manipur Frontier in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

favours or even receiving royal patronage. It shows that there was no influence of Hinduism in the Meitei court and society. It was only from the period of Charairongba and especially from his son (Garibniwas) that Hinduism was given royal patronage. And it was also a period when the Meitei kingdom and monarch were constantly threatened by both internal (intrigues to dethrone the monarch) and external (Burmese invasions) factors. It is very clear that Hinduism maintained a low profile for centuries but received royal patronage suddenly. It must be because of the king's drive for a new faith, higher than the different gods of various clans to contain the political chaos of the period. Also, from the above pattern of incidents it can also be interpreted that Hinduism always became a vital force in maintaining the growth of the political order every time when the authority of the ruler was at stake. It is quite clear that temple building and Meitei state religious ceremonies were very important in strengthening the divine monarch and its sovereignty.

This whole vast array of cultural and social patterns became one of the most important institutions in shaping the state of pre-colonial Manipur. The political development of pre-colonial Manipur does not consist of only a relentless unfolding of a monolithic oriental despotism but of an expanding cloud of localized, fragile, loosely interrelated petty principles. A fundamental task for everyone who is concerned to understand the pattern of state politics of pre-colonial Manipur is to understand the process of Hinduism and its influences in Manipur. This process of Hinduization in Manipur gives substance to the schematic outline of structural changes and constructed developmental phase in the history of pre-colonial Manipur. The stupendous art of dancing, temple building, pilgrimage and other Hindu rituals in daily life was to strengthen the divine monarch and to popularize the belief of Hinduism but it can be also seen as maintenance of social and political integrity of the state. Court ceremonial became the driving force of court politics and mass ritual became a device to shore up the state. Thus the process of Hinduization had impact on the value structure of the Manipur state and the ruling class. It had a definite impact not only on religious doctrines, rituals and popular beliefs, but also on arts and culture as well.

## Chapter 4

### Economic Structure of Manipur before First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-25)

The advent of Anglo-Burmese War was a turning point in the history of Manipur. With the help of British East India Company, Manipur regained its freedom from the Burmese. Thereafter, socio-economy and political structure of the Manipur became more stable with the establishment of the proper taxation system and well maintained roads. Well constructed roads encouraged the trading network between Manipur and the neighbouring states. The relationship between British East India Company and Manipur, and political, economic development after 1825 will be discussed in the next chapter. Regardless intervention of British East India Company, Meitei kingdom had been existed even before the war as we have seen and it is well known fact that economy was one of the main factors of early state formation of Manipur. It is therefore important to study the economic structure of early Meitei kingdom.

The state as a higher form of political organization came into existence when economic relations were further sophisticated by privatization of resources and extraction of surplus by the dominant group in the society.<sup>1</sup> Bhattacharjee supported the argument of Henry Morgan and Friedrich Engels that surplus generation, extraction, and redistribution were the main common factors in the process of all state formations. Henri Claessen and Peter Skalnik also believed that the progress in production and promotion of surplus, tribute and affluence were the main factors that lead to the development of early institutions into statehood in almost all the case in the world.<sup>2</sup> It is well known in every corner of the world that state emerged only when a community was itself capable of producing a surplus sufficient for the maintenance of a non-producing authority and followed by a system appropriating as a tribute the requisite surplus from a subject community. This chapter will focus mainly on the generation of surplus and its distribution in Meitei kingdom before the advent of Anglo-Burmese war. However

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<sup>1</sup>Bhattacharjee, J B. Economic Dimension of the Meitei State formation. In *State and Economy in Pre-colonial Manipur*, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 2010

<sup>2</sup>Claessen, Henri J. M. and Skalnik, Peter. *The Early State*, Mouton Publisher, New York, 1978.p.7

certain systems and practices (which were supposed to be rooted in earlier period) which prevailed after Anglo-Burmese War will also be looked into in order to reconstruct the economic structure of Meitei Kingdom.

#### 4.1 Settlement

Settlement is a prerequisite for agriculture. Settlement process should be intensively analyzed since Meitei kingdom economy was mainly based on agriculture. Due to the environmental condition of the valley of Manipur, cultivation could only begin after certain operations of several phases. It has been perceived by most of the scholars that, earlier, the valley of Manipur was swampy with a large number of lakes and marshes which were required to be drained continuously.<sup>3</sup> The water from swampy areas was drained out from the valley through three rivers namely Imphal River, Iril River, Nambul River and other rivers in the valley. There is still a myth that the valley of Manipur was, in the ancient time, used to be a vast lake and the only dried area was called Kangla (meaning dried land), which is considered as the cradle of Meitei civilization.<sup>4</sup> This myth was given the Hindu oriented flavor after the Hinduism was vastly accepted in the Meitei society. Now the myth is,

...Parvati and Siva performed the Ras dance in Manipur after draining away the water in the valley through a tunnel which was made by Siva's trident (trisul). Ananta, the serpent god was overjoyed and sprinkled the land with the sparkling gems, hence land was given the name Manipur means 'land of gems'...<sup>5</sup>

Most parts of Manipur valley was still a large tract of swamps and marshes until the time when colonial officers had the first contact with the country. According to Pemberton, there was rain throughout the year on average. He further pointed out that from March, rain became very common and there was no guaranty for fine weather from mid-march

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<sup>3</sup>Kabui, Gangumei, Evolution of State, in *State and Economy in Pre-colonial Manipur*, (edt) Bhattacharjee J B, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 2010, p12.

<sup>4</sup>Kabui. op.cit. *Glimpses of Land and People of Ancient Manipur*. p.4

<sup>5</sup>ibid

until November. He even said that November, December, January, and February were the only months which remained totally dried.<sup>6</sup>

In order to settle in the valley, the first and foremost thing required was to make it dry by draining the water out from the valley. Since the excessive water in the valley area flowed through the rivers connected to the Loktak Lake, the practice of enlarging or deepening those rivers and digging new canals was practiced with the kings' authority.<sup>7</sup>In other words, controlling water flow was one of the most important projects. Some of the activities taken up by the Meitei Kings were digging canals, dredging of the river, besides the regular maintenance of roads while establishing new villages. These efforts made by the king are the regular entries of the *Cheitharol Kumbaba and Ningthaurol Lambuba*. The reference of dredging and digging canals could be found as early as Taothingmang's reign (264 CE). It is recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba*,

“Taothingmang began to reign. In his reign Taothingmang and his elder Yoimonpa dredged most of the rivers of Kangleipak”.<sup>8</sup>

According to Amal Singh, it was Khakemba who changed the course of the Imphal River to pass through Kangla, and several others canals were also dug.<sup>9</sup>There is no proper evidence that shows Khakemba changed the course of the Imphal River to pass through the capital Kangla. However, it was during Khakemba's reign that maximum numbers of dredging of rivers and digging of canals have been recorded in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. The following incidence of the dredging of rivers and digging of canals are recorded during Khakemba in *Cheitharol Kumbaba*,

“Those who were building up the Thenka River bank lost their lives”<sup>10</sup>

“They also dug the KyangKhong canal”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pemberton.op.cit.pp.34-35

<sup>7</sup> Wakhemcha.op.cit.p.22

<sup>8</sup> Parratt. op.cit.*Cheitharol kumbaba*.p.23

<sup>9</sup> Singh,S. Amal, Technology, Occupational Distribution and Settlement Pattern In Early Manipur, In (edt) Bhattacharjee J.B *State and Economy in Pre-Colonial Manipur*, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 2010.p. 104

<sup>10</sup> Parratt.op.cit.*Cheitharol kumbaba*.p.69

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.p.70

“They also dug up the canal for boats at Wakching”. “Huitromba Aarok was killed while trying to dam up Para Thinglen River”.<sup>12</sup>

“Para Thinglen River was dredged. The old river was dammed up”.<sup>13</sup>

“They dredged the courses of rivers and dug a canal at Marongkhong”.<sup>14</sup>

There are also records for making new roads. *Cheithraol Kumababa* records the opening of a new road to Mekak village and also completion of various roads to various villages like Wangthonpi and Haitraopi.<sup>15</sup> It is also recorded that various prisoners of war were used for digging up an area for new villages.<sup>16</sup> The improvement of roads might have been made to bring about cultural and political links with the epicenter and the newly established villages. The maximum numbers of markets and granaries were said to be established by Khakemba. The openings of markets and granaries will be discussed briefly later in this chapter. It shows that Khakemba had introduced several infrastructural works to improve the settlements of his subjects. He is also said to have introduced several new and varied elements to the life of the kingdom from the introduction of brick-making, to the playing of Polo, to the wearing of the *langmei* feather by the king Khakemba, the smoking of tobacco with a smoking pot and so on. According to Gangumei, the use of bricks by Manipuris during the time of Khakemba was learnt from the Chinese.<sup>17</sup> He suggested that the Chinese name of brick was *chek*, which is also same in Meitei vocabulary. It is also believed that the Chinese built the two big dragon statues at the gate of the Kangla, which was destroyed during the Burmese invasion, and the *Chetharol Kumbaba* records that the people were making brick walls around the royal palace for the first time.<sup>18</sup>

We may see these elements like construction of roads, and draining out of water from the valley for better settlement as the main components of early state formation process. There were special families who worked as *sansaroi* whose duty was to make

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.p.73

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.p.75

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.p.76

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.p.71

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.p.65

<sup>17</sup>Kabui.op.cit. *History of Manipur Vol-1*.p.221

<sup>18</sup> Parratt.op.cit.*Cheitharol.Kumbaba.*.p.70



houses and bridges for which they cut down trees and brought other building materials.<sup>19</sup> Regarding the settlement in Imphal, Johnston said “The want of the town was a good water supply; there were one or two fair size tanks or ponds, as they would be called in England. Beyond this, all the water obtainable was derived from small ponds, one or more of which was to be found in every garden enclosure.”<sup>20</sup> It shows that the Meitei kings ensured proper water supply for consuming as well as for irrigation purposes. It also meant that Meitei kings frequently involved in the development plans for the valley. We now move on to the next section which focuses on agriculture even as one of the most important priorities in the growth of the state was the extension of agriculture.

## 4.2 Agriculture

Agriculture was the main occupation of the people of Manipur, especially in the valley.<sup>21</sup> According to Rohinikumar Sharma and Ranjit Singh, in the early period, there was shifting cultivation in Manipur during the clan wars for superiority in the valley.<sup>22</sup> This view was also supported by Bhattacharjee who also said that there were inter-clan feuds among various clans over the occupation of agricultural land and state was established after the *Nithaujas* gained control over the fertile rice land by subjugating other clans in the valley.<sup>23</sup> Before the consolidation of clans under the sovereignty of *Ningthaujas*, the main occupation in the valley was hunting and food gathering. According to Gangumei Kabui, the *Ningthaujas* were the first to cultivate the wet rice in the valley.<sup>24</sup>

The wet rice farming essentially requires a plentiful water supply. Although, over abundant water can cause another problem. In case of Manipur valley, controlling excessive water was one of many challenges awaited. In order to solve the problem, Meitei kings focused on the concentration of labor and innovation of farming technique.

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<sup>19</sup>Foreign Dept, Political Branch, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1856, Consultation No. 135.

<sup>20</sup>Johnstone. op.cit.p 98

<sup>21</sup>Hodson. op.cit. *The Meitheis*.p.29, and Brown.p.83

<sup>22</sup> Sharma, K Rohinikumar and Singh, O Ranjit, *Outlining Pre-Colonial Economy Of Manipur*. In (edt) J.B Bhattacharjee, *State and Economy in Pre-Colonial Manipur*, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 2010.p.146

<sup>23</sup>Bhattacharjee. op.cit.p.2

<sup>24</sup>Kabui.op.cit. *History of Manipur*.p.114

In Manipur valley, dredging of rivers and digging of canals were the main tactics to drain overflowing water from the paddy field. We have seen various records of dredging of river and digging of new canals in the earlier section of this chapter. Furthermore, during King Chingthangkhomba's reign (1764-1798), it is recorded in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* that,

“The pool was inaugurated in the presence of Shantidas Mahapuris, King, Queen, the nobles and brave men of the land which was called *Patsa Sagar* (now Mantri Pukhri/pond) and it was used for the propose of cultivation in the area”.<sup>25</sup>

There is an interesting event recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* that in one instance all the population in the capital including women and royal women were joined in draining the river.<sup>26</sup> Meitei king required the huge labor force in order to drain out the excess water frequently. Regarding labor concentration, we have seen in the first chapter how Meiteiking always tried to increase the subject's population through capturing war prisoners and welcoming immigrants. In addition to that, the system of *Lallup* became much handy in terms of performing such a huge state development activities. It is also possible that the Ningthaujas were trying to subjugate the other clans in order to maintain the labor power since they were the first one to cultivate the wet rice. It is clear that the controlling of water had been the main state activity throughout the history of Manipur. The innumerable stream from the hill and various canals ensured an adequate irrigation, even to the fields which are above the level of the general inundation, made the valley most acceptable for the wet rice cultivation.<sup>27</sup>

Pemberton pointed it out regarding an adequate irrigation which made abundant rice and other vegetables produce.<sup>28</sup> Further, Hodson said, “The Raja (King of Manipur) was anxious to bring more land into cultivation, for which purpose water course are to be dug”.<sup>29</sup> Brown stated in his report, “It has been ascertained from all the sides that within

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<sup>25</sup>Paratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.118

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.p.112

<sup>27</sup> Brown. op.cit.p.30

<sup>28</sup> Pemberton.op.cit.pp.29-31

<sup>29</sup> Hodson. op.cit. *The Meiteis*.p.87

the last few years more specially, cultivation has been considerably increased; water-courses have been extensively constructed".<sup>30</sup>

The whole land of the Manipur belongs to the king and it was under his whim either to give away or retain as he pleased.<sup>31</sup> Each male member of the society who was liable to work under the system of *lallup* was granted a *puree/pari* ('measurement of areas' which is more or less equivalent to three acres) of land. Under the king there was an official named the *Phunan Salungba*, whose duty was to superintend all matters connected with land cultivation like land measurement, receiving rent, etc.<sup>32</sup> The tax in kind was collected by the King from its subjects. According to Brown, the tax collected by the state was liable to many modifications.<sup>33</sup> During his time as political agents, the tax varies from two baskets to thirteen baskets from a *puree/pari* of land.<sup>34</sup> According to Parratt, there was a particular community called *selloi* in the valley who paid their taxes to the state in coins or *sels* while the rest paid it in kind.<sup>35</sup> Hill people also paid their tributes or taxes in kind such as wax, cotton, cloths and ivory were the main items of tribute paid by the hill tribes.<sup>36</sup> The *Cheitharol Kumbaba* gives the various incidences regarding the punishment of certain communities or areas because of the non-payment of their tributes. For example, *Chingsong* community paid *phipong chami* (kind of cloths) as a tribute to the Meitei king. *Chingsong* was devastated by King Tapungpa because of the non-payment of tribute to the state store house.<sup>37</sup> However, the data of the taxes had been managed inadequately till the British officer started collecting data after the Anglo-Burmese War, which will be discussed briefly later in the next chapter.

The agricultural produce of the country consists of principally rice, which is the staple food.<sup>38</sup> Tobacco, sugarcane, indigo, mustard, the different types of lentils and opium were also cultivated.<sup>39</sup> Peas, potatoes, cabbages, carrots, radishes, beetroot, turnip

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<sup>30</sup> Brown.op.cit.p. 87

<sup>31</sup> Ibid p85

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.85

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.p.86

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.26

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.p.36

<sup>38</sup> Pemberton.op.cit.p.29

<sup>39</sup>ibid

were later introduced by the colonial officers.<sup>40</sup>The villages are scattered over a large extent of ground, as each house is surrounded by a little garden, in which vegetables were extensively cultivated. It is interesting to note that the Chandarpur (a village in Cachar) was given to Manipur King Ghambir Singh on the condition that Manipur king would turn those arid lands under cultivation.<sup>41</sup>

In every village, there was an officer called *Lau mi Rakpa* who was responsible for the work of the villagers in cultivating the fields.<sup>42</sup>The main occupation of the *Meiteis* was agriculture.<sup>43</sup> Once Captain Gordon complained regarding the absence of a considerable number of armies (Manipur Levy) during the cultivation time of every year, so the government expedition was not generally in force.<sup>44</sup> Brown refers to striking similarities between the agricultural practices of Manipur and those of East Bengal. Two fundamental forms of cultivation- (i) *Punghool*, in which seeds were directly sown in the wet, ploughed fields and (ii) *Lingba* in which transplantation of seedlings from the nurseries were extensively used in the valley areas of Manipur. The tools and implementation of cultivation were also not qualitatively different from those in east Bengal. Animal power, particularly bullocks and buffalos were commonly used in drawing plough and carts. *Langol* (iron tipped, single hoe-plough), *kangpot* (sledge), *cheirong* (paddy thresher) etc., were the important implements of cultivation. Yot (spade), *thangjou* (multi-purpose large *dao*) and *sinjang* (solid iron hand axe) were also commonly used.<sup>45</sup> Brown stated that no particular manure was ever placed on the ground and year after year crops were raised on the same spot.

It was during the time of Khakemba that new rice known as *taothabi*, which could be grown easily in the swampy areas without requiring much of hard labor on draining out the water from the field, was introduced in the valley.<sup>46</sup> After the Burmese war, British officers took an intense survey of the country, and they found various kinds of rice which were cultivated in the valley of Manipur. Brown even gave an extensive account of the different varieties of rice distinguished by size and colour of the grain.

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<sup>40</sup>Hodson. op.cit. *The Meitheis*.p.40

<sup>41</sup>Foreign Dept. Political Branch, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1832, Consultation No. 110.

<sup>42</sup>Hodson. op.cit. *The Meitheis*.p.61

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.p.22

<sup>44</sup> Foreign Dept. Political Branch, 28<sup>th</sup> Dec 1840, Consultation No. 74

<sup>45</sup>Brown. op.cit.pp.86-88 and E W Dun, *Gazetteer of Manipu*.Manas Publication. Delhi. 1992.

<sup>46</sup>Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.72

Brown stated that the land in Manipur was very suitable for growing rice because of its moist and marshy terrain. He continued to say that more than nineteen varieties of rice were grown in the country, naming them: Phowrail, Yenthick, Moirang Phow, Phowkuk Chahow, Chahow Musapalbi, Luining, Phongang, Towthabi Phow, Chahow Puritole, Chahow Munkhang, Kuckcheng Phow, Haidup Phow, Sugole Yangba, Chahow Erikole and Chahow Sempak. This rice may be divided into early and late crops. The early crop ripened in three months and was ready for cutting in September. Of late years a large quantity of the early sort has been sown. Of the early there are four varieties vis., Sujikhong, Dumai, Kubo, Phow and Phowrel Angulbah. The late ripen in six months that is around November.<sup>47</sup> It shows that the people from the Manipur valley were fully aware of the fertility of the soil and annual weather circle until and unless there was a natural disturbance. This level of mastery in soil and weather could not be achieved in few decades but centuries. Looking at the types of rice and its annual circle of harvesting, it is highly possible that the Meitei had been experimenting with soils and the type of rice to find out which was more suitable to the environmental condition of the valley. For example, new types of rice such as Taothabi were introduced due to their hydrophilic characteristics, which facilitated rice cultivation even with the water problem in the valley.

It is doubtless that production of rice was abundant because of the fact that the *Meiteis* were quite aware of the value of the fertility of the soil. Simultaneously, irrigation system throughout the valley was well maintained. There was sufficient rice production, and surplus rice was even stored for the emergency needs.

Indeed the country had started establishing the state granaries in different parts of the state to store grains. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* is giving a brief account on the establishment of the state granaries and markets in different part of the country. Granary is called *kei* in Meiteilon (language spoken by Meiteis). The keeper of the granary was known as *keirakpa*. Khakemba established such granaries at Kakyao, Langpok Leihau, Koireng, Monsang, Kiyam and Wangoo. This suggests that the villages had to contribute a certain amount of paddy in the form of tax to the state after retaining their requirement. From Khakemba's reign, the state economy also seems to be developed well enough to

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<sup>47</sup>Brown.op.cit.pp. 83-84

cross the subsistence economy level. In fact, distribution of grain was done during Khakemba's period when there was a scarcity of food caused by natural disasters such as flood or drought. According to *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, distribution of grain was practiced from Khakemba's period and continued till the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The following are descriptions in *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.

“There was flood and paddy was scarce that year. Birds also destroyed whatever paddy was left after the flood. The markets were closed. Paddy from the Kontha (kei) was brought up and it was distributed to meet the shortage”.<sup>48</sup>

“Wednesday, the king sitting by the royal gate, paddy was distributed to all those who were frail and suffering and under stress from hunger”.<sup>49</sup>

The first mentioned incidence of distribution of food was during Khakemba and later one was during Ghambir Singh. Manipur state formation was possible by the generation of surplus production of rice and tributes, which were collected from the subjects.

### 4.3 Coinage

*Keithel* means market in Meiteilon. The word *kei* literally means ‘granary’ or ‘storing place’ and *thel* means ‘displaying the purchased items’.<sup>50</sup> *Cheitharol Kumbaba* records the establishment of ten *keithel* since 1614 (during Khakemba's reign) at different places in the kingdom; they were Sana keithel, Kha keithel, Moirang keithel, Khuman keithel, Phaibung keithel, Chairen keithel, Namphaon keithel, Konglen keithel and Andro keithel. There were different types of markets in terms of the commodities on sale and opening times. Some of the markets opened in the early morning and closed before noon, while others opened only in the afternoon. Further, a few markets opened once a week, and they were called *Hapta keithel* (*hapta* meaning ‘weekly’). It is recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* that,

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<sup>48</sup>Op.cit.Parratt.*Cheitharol Kumbaba*.pp.76-77

<sup>49</sup>Op.cit.Parratt.*CheitharolKumbaba vol-2*.p.86

<sup>50</sup>Kamei, Budha. Trade connection of Manipur with Southeast Asia in the Pre-British Period., Published in *The Sanghai Express January 18, 2017*

“Phaibang market was for garments and edibles, Chairen market was for selling paddy, which had been collected compulsorily by order and the market was held once a week. Kontong market was to sell basket from Takhen, Antro market was a place for monthly visit by the people of Mawao”.<sup>51</sup>

The articles that were sold in the markets consisted of food and clothing; dried fish, rice, vegetables, pan supari, meat, and clothes, ornaments. Only women conducted the buying and selling of various articles. Men, with the exception of foreigners, were not allowed to enter the market places.<sup>52</sup> Dun has said that it would be difficult to find more industrious women in the rest of the India than the Manipuri women.<sup>53</sup>

According to Grimwood, there was a trade that existed between the hills and the valley even before the arrival of the British.<sup>54</sup> There was a barter system among the hill tribes of Manipur and the valley of Manipur.<sup>55</sup> The values of goods were generally determined through bargaining between the buyer and the seller about their perspective goods.<sup>56</sup> Fowls, ducks, geese, salt, iron, rice were mainly bought at a high price by the hill peoples.<sup>57</sup>

According to the general belief amongst Meiteis, coins had been minted since the time of Pakhangba.<sup>58</sup> Hodson said that he was given the oldest form of *sel* (believed to be from Pakhangba’s period by the Meiteis) by the Meitei officials in the court. This particular *sel* was a shield-shaped disk of bell metal, very thin but of a large size (3 and 1/2 inches in diameter) and it has no marks on it.<sup>59</sup> N.G Rhodes and S.K Bose (citing N K Singh) suggested that the coin, known as *Taret Maji Naibi* was used in ancient Manipur

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<sup>51</sup>Parratt. op.cit..*Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.70

<sup>52</sup>Brown. op.citp.91.

<sup>53</sup>Dun.op.cit.p.23

<sup>54</sup>Grimwood.op.cit.p.55 and political Agent’Tour Dairy :No 45 November 10<sup>th</sup> 1908 and No 43 Oct 23<sup>rd</sup> 1901.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.16

<sup>56</sup>Political Agent’s Tour Dairy No. 10 Feb 1896.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.p33

<sup>58</sup>Hodson.op.cit. *The Meiteis*.p.36-37

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

to worship gods.<sup>60</sup> However, this early account of minting coins is impossible to be proved because of lack of concrete evidence. The chronicles of Manipur do not provide any help in determining the nature and origin of the coinage. Yet, *Cheitharol Kumbaba* frequently mentioned the distribution of *sel* (coin) by Meitei kings from the period of Garibniwas. Mc Culloch credited Khakemba with the introduction of coins in Manipur.<sup>61</sup> However, the first mentioning of the *sel* or coin in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* was recorded during Garibniwas' reign. It is recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba*,

“Chingthoupam Seran and Natok from Aaheipa Awang, both had their hands cut off for stealing coin from the state exchequer...There was food scarcity. Paddy was very expensive. One pair of sangbai/basket of paddy cost forty-five big *sels*”.<sup>62</sup>

From this period, the demand for coin as a currency or medium of exchange existed in Manipur. It is recorded in the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* (during the reign of Bhagyachandra),

“There was severe shortage of food. Salt and *sel* were distributed in the market. Each person received 100 *sel* and 100 salt cake”.<sup>63</sup>

It seems plausible that at the time of food scarcity due to flood or drought, the traditional barter system collapsed and the coin was used as a medium of exchange. Through the cases mentioned above, it is legitimate to consider that the *sel* was functioning as money. The price of ‘one pair of sangbai/basket of paady’ was expressed as forty-five sels, which means *sel* was already functioning as a unit of account. In other words, the *sel* was functioning as money amongst Manipur people. Simultaneously, it is legitimate to consider the notion of possession existed amongst the people of Manipur at the time. Given the record that explains stealing was considered as a punishable crime, it is natural to conclude that there was a regulation which prohibits stealing. In other words, people

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<sup>60</sup> Rhodes N.G & Bose S.K, Coinage and Economy of the Meitei Kingdom. In (edt) Bhattacharjee, J.B. *State and Economy in Pre-Colonial Manipur*. Akansha Publishing House. Calcutta.2010.p.62

<sup>61</sup>Culloch. op.cit.p.28

<sup>62</sup>Parratt. op.cit*Cheitharol Kumbaba*.pp.121-122

<sup>63</sup>Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba Vol-2*.p.8



were having a notion of possession. With this notion of possession of private wealth, classification emerged.

Bhattacharjee believed that Brahmins and Meiteis who were settled on the bank of the rivers in the valley were wealthier than other people settled in the peripheral area in the valley. Dun described the classification of rich and poor as,

“The dwelling houses of the Munnipurees are all the same form, but those of the rich are larger, and constructed of better materials than those of the poor, that is, the post and beams of the houses of the former are of wood, whilst those of latter are of bamboo”.<sup>64</sup>

The concept of distinguishing the rich and poor explains social hierarchy based on economic status existed. However, it is hard to classify the social structure of Manipur based on economic criteria due to lack of available sources.

Brown and Hodson give a clear account of the coinage in Manipur. The shape and size of *sel* varied in time. While Brown was in Manipur as a political agent, the only coin being used in Manipur was a bell-metal which was small in size, weighing only about sixteen grams. The process of coinage was also very primitive. Brown narrated how *sels* were coined in Manipur: “The metal is first cast in little pellets: these are then softened by fire and placed on an anvil: one blow of hammer flattens the pellet into an irregular round figure”.<sup>65</sup> The market value of the *sel* varied from time to time. During the time of Brown, 480 *sels* equaled one British or Burmese rupee. Hodson describes the different forms of *sels* from different periods. In Khakemba’s reign, the *sel* was almost square and had faint marks on it. According to Hodson, from the period of King Chingthangkhomba/Bhagyachandra (till the present in Manipur), the shape of *sel* was almost unaltered except the size; the size of the *sel* became slightly smaller. It was also recorded in the *Cheitharol Kumababa* that the smaller round *sel* replaced the big one from the time of Chingthangkhomba.<sup>66</sup> Hodson further said there was also a silver *sel* in a

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<sup>64</sup> Bhattacharjee.op.cit.p.20

<sup>65</sup> Brown.op.cit. p.89

<sup>66</sup> Parratt.op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p13

square shape, which had the same value and weight as the British and Burmese rupee.<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, Hodson could collect only one specimen of them (silver coin).

It would be possible to conclude that the minting of coin had started slightly earlier, before Garibniwas, for legitimizing royal authority. In addition to that, I would like to consider coinage as an evidence of trading network between Manipur and neighbouring countries and as a mode of collecting revenue. According to the British official accounts, Manipur seems to have had iron ores. It shows the fact that the metal to make coins (mainly bell metal and sometimes silver) were from the neighbouring countries. According to both Brown, and Hodson, the metal used to make *sel* was obtained from Burma.

Regarding the coinage of Assam, Manoj Kumar Chowdhury suggested that coin was minted for the first time during the reign of Gaurinath Singha (1780-95) in the Ahom kingdom.<sup>68</sup> Before Gaurinath, trade was carried on usually through barter in Ahom (Assam).<sup>69</sup> If Chowdhury's presumption that the minting of coin started in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was true, then it almost coincides with the time of mentioning of first coin and distribution of coins in Manipur royal chronicle. The simultaneity of minting coins in both kingdoms might be just a coincidence but it would be a more plausible explanation to say coinage became the medium of exchange in trade relation or tax payment in their respective kingdoms.

It is clear that, later, both states (Ahoms and Manipur) collected taxes on export and import items in coins. British Political Agents in Manipur furnished an account of taxes levied on goods imported and exported, which will be discussed briefly in the next chapter. It is very interesting that the same kinds of weekly markets mentioned earlier also existed in the Ahom kingdom as well. According to Chowdhury, during Ahom rule, weekly markets were held in villages like Barapana, Dij Bogai, Sakmuri, Hakim Hat, Malapara and many places along the foot of the Khasi hills.<sup>70</sup> It is highly possible that traders or travelers from both states shared the idea of commerce. Kunjeswori Devi

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<sup>67</sup>Brown.op.cit. p.89

<sup>68</sup>Chowdhury, Manoj Kumar, Economic Condition Of Assam in Medieval Period: With Reference To Kamrup. In *International Journal Of Social Science and Human Research*, Vol-3, Issue 4, October-December 2015, pp,86-97

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

suggested that the origin of the coin was due to mutual contact between the Meities and neighbouring state.<sup>71</sup> She described that as a result of these mutual contact, the Meiteis started eyeing the products of other states and the exchange of items was started. According to her, these mutual exchanges of items subsequently formed the shape of trade and led to the establishment of a rudimentary system of coinage.

#### 4.4 Routes

It is important to know the geographical feature of the Manipur in order to understand the trade routes that connected Manipur and its surrounding states like Cachar, Tripura, Assam, and Burma. The cartographic of routes given here are mostly based on the work of Pemberton.

The only river that connects the Manipur and Assam is the Barrak River or Soormah River. Barrack river originates from Japvo in the Manipur hill and flows to the south through mountain terrain upto Tipaimuk near the tri Junction of three States: Manipur, Assam and Mizoram. Barak then enters the plain near Lakhimpur (Assam) and flows in Bangladesh.

Another important river through the Manipur valley is Imphal River (also known as Manipur River). According to Pemberton, Manipur River was called by different names as its course enters different areas in Manipur: Nankhathe Khyoung, Imphal Toorel, Mueeethuee Toorel and Khongba Toorel.<sup>72</sup> The river originates from the Senapati in Manipur hills and enters Imphal valley. It passes through Loktak Lake in the Manipur valley, and Kabaw valley in Burma then meets Irawadee River. According to Pemberton, it was navigable only by an ordinary canoe, but larger boats could also be navigable during the rainy season.<sup>73</sup>

According to Pemberton, the most preferable road to Manipur from Assam was via Cachar. Pemberton further explained that the distance from Calcutta to Ava (Burma) via Assam, Cachar, and Manipur was 1052 miles.<sup>74</sup> Ms.Grimwood suggested that the

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<sup>71</sup> L. Kunjeswori Devi, *Archeaology In Manipur*, Rajesh Publication, New Delhi,2003.p.29

<sup>72</sup> Pemberton. op.cit.p.10

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.p.147

distance between Cachar and Manipur capital was around 130 miles but only 24 miles from the Manipur territorial border.<sup>75</sup> It reached the Imphal via Bishenpur.

Another route, which was less preferable for travelers from Assam and Bengal, started from Sekmai in Manipur valley and reached Jorhat (Assam). Pemberton has described that the total distance of this route, from Sekmai (Manipur), to Joorhat (Assam) was  $222\frac{1}{2}$  miles. This route was 15 - 25 miles east of the one already described earlier.<sup>76</sup> Pemberton concluded his observation on these roads as,

“From what has been said, it will have been observed, that both routes are in their general characters very similar; they both leave the Muneepoor valley by defiles, which stretch for many miles among the hills: they then cross the Barak river, ascend at different points of the same great chain, which, seeping from the sources of the Burhampooter, Irawatee, and Ningthee rivers, round the eastern borders of Assam, stretch along its whole southern frontier, and terminate 500 miles distant at the great western bend of the Burhampooter. Both routes then descend to the northern foot of this mountain barrier, and both pass from thence over the sandy beds of rivers, which wind through dense forests, to the inhabited parts of the Assam valley. There is very little more than 20 miles difference in the length of the two routes, the eastern of Kaboomè one being the shortest”.<sup>77</sup>

According to Kamei, Manipur valley was lucky to have water routes (Barak river and Manipur river) which connected them with the outside world.<sup>78</sup> These rivers were used for transporting forest products and agricultural products, mainly rice. Bhattacharjee believed that Kyamba and his successors in the 16<sup>th</sup> century opened routes to Assam, Cachar, Tripura and Burma that gave a fillip to trade and commerce. For instance, it is recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* (during the reign of Nongyinhapa 1524-1542),

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<sup>75</sup>Grimwood. op.cit.p.13

<sup>76</sup>Pemberton. op.cit.p.61

<sup>77</sup>ibid

<sup>78</sup>Kamei.op.cit.

“The road to Tekhao was opened. Khongnampi, TekhaoReima, left for Tekhao. They also make Tekhao *lu* from that time”.<sup>79</sup>

However, the route that connected Manipur, Cachar and Assam seems to have already been there earlier than what Bhattacharjee had suggested. Even though the opening of the route to Assam is mentioned in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* during the first half of 16<sup>th</sup> century, the movement of the Cacharis and Assamese towards the valley of Manipur had been mentioned earlier during Kongyampa (1324) in the *CheitharolKumbaba*. It is recorded,

“Meiteis fought and defeated the Mayangs[Meitei used to call Cacharis or Assamese as Mayang] in KoupaHinglen Hill. They captured MayangMaipaSamloipa, Lakasumka Tao, Aarang Tao and AefeRacha who was a skilled swordsman”.<sup>80</sup>

This suggests that there were movements of people even earlier. It is possible that the roads to Cachar and Assam were renovated by Kyamba or Nongyinphapa. In any case, it can be concluded that the route already existed, considering Cacharis and Assamese were coming to Manipur.

#### **4.5 Trade Relationship with the Neighbouring States**

Stargardt has pointed to a trade route connecting China, Burma, Manipur, and Assam before 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>81</sup>Stargardt suggested that the Chinese (from Yunnan province) had strong trade relations with upper Burma and India. Stargardt complained regarding scholars mainly focusing more on the sea routes than the land routes in the Southeast Asia. Stargardt said there were two main land routes that connected India and China through Burma in the medieval period. The first one was in the lower Burma (this route

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<sup>79</sup>Parratt. Op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.49

<sup>80</sup>Parratt. op.cit..*Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.35

<sup>81</sup>StargardtJanice, Burma’s Economic and Diplomatic Relations with India and china from Early Medieval Sources, in *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 14, No. 1 , April, 1971.pp.43-44

didn't pass through the valley of Manipur) which was preferable by the travelers. Stargardt described the second one (which pass through the valley of Manipur) as follows,

“The general trend of the route seems, however, to indicate that it traversed Upper Burma by the most direct means afforded by a difficult terrain. Entering also at a north-eastern point, from Yunnan, it reached the Irrawaddy, perhaps in the vicinity of Bhamo, and then passed across to the Chinwin, the route proceeded west for 1,000 *li* to reach the kingdom of Manipur and, surmounting a great chain of mountains to the west, reached the capital of the kingdom of Kamarupa, the modern Gauhati, after 330 *li*”.<sup>82</sup>

Stargardt further said,

“Economic and political strength of the capitals-- whichever it was-- passed through were sufficient to attract travelers from China to India to come a long way south in order to visit it. So those kingdoms cannot be merely considered as an intermediary staging post on India-China trade route but as a participant in that trade in its own right.”<sup>83</sup>

The main articles attracting Chinese from this trade route were salt, gold, serpentine and amber, and varieties of plants and crops.

According to Stargardt, the study of population dispersal also reveals the trade relations, which was taken place in the area. In the other word, the circulation of people shows that there was the establishment of the trading network in the region.<sup>84</sup> Regarding the movement of people, Pemberton said that there was a large Manipuri population who had been settling from early period in the southern part of Cachar.<sup>85</sup> It shows that there was trading network between Manipur and its neighbours.

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid

<sup>83</sup>Ibid

<sup>84</sup>Ibid

<sup>85</sup>Pemberton. op.cit.p.208

Budhaa Iso suggested that Manipur had had trade relations with the neighboring states like Assam, Cachar, Tripura and Burma since ancient times. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* has given some references regarding the trade between Manipur and the neighboring states. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, records extensive reports on the matter of arrival of elephants from the neighboring states and the condition of horses in the state. There are frequent entries such as:“Many elephants which are the bride wealth for Meitei Reima (one of the princes) arrived from Kapo (Kabaw)”<sup>86</sup>,”Monday, Khomma Tari and others left for Mayang to buy elephants.”<sup>87</sup>There are many other entries regarding the selling, buying, and even the birth and deaths of elephants such as,

“The wild elephant from Kapo (kabaw) died when a nail was driven into its back”<sup>88</sup>

“Two elephants, a male and a female, which had not grown tusk, arrived from Takhen”<sup>89</sup>

It is possible that the elephant trade was a royal monopoly since the royal families mainly used elephants as a marriage gift. Paikhomba established elephant stables at Samurou at the center of the village.<sup>90</sup> Manipuris were known for their cavalry during the time of first Anglo-Burmese War. Pemberton recorded that,

In Muneepoor, their cavalry has invariably proved most formidable to the Burmese.<sup>91</sup>

In fact,*Cheitharol Kumbaba* also maintained accounts regarding horses as well. It is recorded that, “Many horses in the market were found being pierced with spears by the Koireng Haos.”<sup>92</sup> It also recorded every horse epidemic in the state .e.g it is recorded in

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<sup>86</sup>Parratt.op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.57

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.p.66

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.p.97

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.p.100

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.p.70

<sup>91</sup> Pemberton. op.cit.pp. 49-51

<sup>92</sup>Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.94

*Cheitharol Kumbaba* “ In the month of kalen (April/May), there was horse epidemic”.<sup>93</sup> It is plausible that both animals were very important in the state affairs either economically or in warfare. From the Royal Chronicles, it is clear that elephants and horses were some of the main articles of trade with the neighboring states. Pemberton even mentioned how Manipuri ponies impressed the other states like Cachar and Burma.<sup>94</sup> Pemberton even mentioned that there were some wealthy zamindars from Sylhet who bought Manipuri ponies at a high price.<sup>95</sup>

Another main article exported from Manipur was the buffalo. There is no record regarding the trade of buffalo in Manipuri sources, but this gap of information can be filled by Pemberton’s report. Pemberton said that the most valuable cattle of the country for agricultural purposes was a buffalo.<sup>96</sup> There were more than 3000 buffaloes in the whole valley at that time and equal numbers of cows, bullock and calves. Pemberton praised the quality of Manipur buffaloes saying that one Manipur buffalo performed nearly double quantity of works that two Bengali bullocks were capable of executing.<sup>97</sup> Lieberman also said that the main commodities in the upper Burma inland trade consisted of salt, oxen, ponies and timbers.<sup>98</sup> Chaudhury also said that buffaloes and salt were the main items imported by the Ahom kingdom from the neighbouring states.<sup>99</sup> He suggested that salt was not produced in the Ahom kingdom and it was costlier than the price of rice, pulse and mustard oil. According to Chaudhury, salt was sold at the rate of 2 to 4 Rupees per mound, and it rose to 10 Rupees per mound in the later period of Ahom rule. Chowdhury suggested that the import of salt by Assamese was mainly from Bengal.<sup>100</sup> However, there might have been the export of salt from Manipur in a small scale since Manipur valley was known for its salt wells.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.83

<sup>94</sup> Ibid 32

<sup>95</sup> Pemberton.op.cit.p.50

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.p. 31

<sup>97</sup> Ibid

<sup>98</sup> Lieberman. op.cit.pp. 145-172

<sup>99</sup>Chowdhury. op.cit.p.90

<sup>100</sup>Ibid



The valley was particularly rich in mineral of salt. The principal salt springs were found on the eastern side of the valley not very far from the hills.<sup>101</sup> The best quality was those of Wueethong, Nigyel, Sekmai, and Chandrkhong. According to Pemberton,

“salt was manufactured in quantities not only sufficient for the consumption of the inhabitants of the valley, but also to be made as an article of traffic with the surrounding tribes, who barter for it their tobacco, ginger, clothes and cotton. The salt from the spring of Wueekhong, is far superior to that of the other localities and it was the only supplier for the Royal family.”<sup>102</sup>

According to Pemberton, the main articles manufactured by Manipur were Khes cloths, turbans, and jackets.<sup>103</sup> Although the cultivation of silk was not properly developed silk was used to make fabrics to make dhotis, pagris, kamar bands and dresses for women, which found their way to Cachar.<sup>104</sup> Manipuri silk products like petticoats, jackets, scarfs were remarkably known for their strength and the brilliance of their colours. Some of these scarfs were very rich in embroidery, and they were highly prized in Burma even though the work was coarse. Rohini Kumar and Ranjit believed that Manipuris are still proud of their ancient heritage in the field of handicraft and especially it was in the field of weaving and embroidery that Manipur excelled amongst all the neighbouring states.<sup>105</sup> The Burmese traders who frequently visited Manipur bought up greedily all the raw silk they could get.<sup>106</sup> This shows the good quality of the silk in Manipur. Johnstone mentioned the origins of the silk industry in Manipur stating that about the year 1250 AD, a large Chinese force invaded the country, but was signally defeated; all who were not killed became prisoners. They taught the Manipuris silk culture, and they also erected two solid blocks of masonry in the palace, but these blocks were leveled with the ground by the Burmese invaders.<sup>107</sup> During the reign of Chorjit Singh, a brisk trade was carried on with the Burmese inhabitants of the frontier through the Kabaw valley (even during the

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<sup>101</sup> Pemberton. op.cit.p.23

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.p.29

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.p.33

<sup>104</sup> Ibid

<sup>105</sup> Rohini Kumar and Ranjit. op.cit. p.159

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Johstone.Op.cit.p.86.

time of tension between the countries), and Chinese merchants from Yunnan used some time to visit Manipur for purposes of trade, bringing the same description of articles they took to Ava(Burma), and carried away wax, ivory, cloths, and ponies of Manipur.<sup>108</sup>

According to Pemberton, the main items delivered in Sylhet through the Barak River, were rice, timber, bamboos and grass which were abundantly produced in the forest of the eastern boundary.<sup>109</sup> Pemberton said Soorma River already had been a remarkable channel to Sylhet, ‘Hubbeegunge’ and ‘Nubbegunge’(it is hard to locate where these places are now) for transportation of all the finest timbers which were cut in the forest of Manipur.<sup>110</sup> Bell metal gongs manufactured by the inhabitants of Yunan (China) were found in almost all the villages along the eastern frontier.<sup>111</sup> It proves that channels for a more extended commercial intercourse did exist.<sup>112</sup>

Regarding the forest products, Pemberton said the following,

“I know no spot in India, in which the product of the forest are more varied and magnificent, but their utility is entirely local, as the nature of the country precludes the possibility of transporting them to foreign market with any prospect of advantages, while for the timber of Kubo, the mangling river affords every facility for floating into the Ningthee river and thence to the Irrawadee river”.<sup>113</sup>

#### **4.6 Importance of Kabaw Valley**

There had always been a tension regarding the territorial boundaries between Manipur and Burma. Kabaw valley was the area that both countries had fought for. The Kabaw valley had been under the control of both countries from time to time depending on the power of the countries. It had been recorded that the valley was a part of Manipur during Kyamba and during Garibniwas’s reign. However, after Garibniwas, the Meitei Kingdom

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<sup>108</sup> Pemberton.op.cit.4

<sup>109</sup> Ibid

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.p.208

<sup>111</sup> Ibid

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid .p.27

was in trouble mainly because of internal rivalries among the royal families and, at the same time, upper Burma became more powerful under the new ruler, Kanbaung. At that time, Kabaw valley was under the control of Burma until the end of First Anglo-Burmese War (1826). Manipur then took over the control of the valley and maintained till 1835. The problem over this issue continued till 1835 when the Kabaw valley was finally handed over to Burma which will be discussed briefly in the final chapter of the thesis. Here we should understand the reason of vehement conflicts over the land. There should be further analysis to find out whether it was solely based on a political issue or other reasons. Regarding this conflict, Pemberton gives certain hints as to the possible causes. According to him,

“Kubo valley is rich in different varieties of sand-stone and slate, hornblende and iron stone, large masses of agalmatolite, which was used by both Manipur and Burma for writing-pencil”.<sup>114</sup>

Further, he also wrote about the richness in different types of fine timber, which was mainly teak.<sup>115</sup> According to him, few teak trees and keos appear in the west of Moreh above the Kubo Valley. Pemberton said he was not aware that the trees (teak and keo) were found in any other part of the Manipur territory.<sup>116</sup> Thingnam Sanjeev has also written about the richness of teak in the Kabaw valley.<sup>117</sup> According to Lieberman, teak became a main material for ship building in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Lieberman said that the chief export items from Burma at the time were cotton and teak.<sup>118</sup> Here the picture becomes clearer regarding the issue over the Kabaw valley. The reason why both states wanted to take control over the valley was mainly because of its economic advantages. In fact, it was recorded by Pemberton that in 1819 there was forcible cutting of teak by Marjit Singh, king of Manipur, who also erected a richly gilded palace in the Kabaw Valley. The court of Ava immediately dispatched the army, and

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid.p.12

<sup>115</sup>Ibid.p.14

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.pp.26-27

<sup>117</sup>ThingnamSanjeev, *Recasting Space: Politics of Frontier Making, in Colonialism and Resistance. In Society and State in Manipur* (edt) Aramban Noni and KangujamSanatomba. Routledge, New York, 2016.p.244

<sup>118</sup> Lieberman. op.cit.p.172

battle was fought between Manipuris and Burmese in Kakching. The battle in Kakching was concluded with the defeat of Marjeet Singh; the king had to flee to Cachar.<sup>119</sup> Pemberton also suggested that,

“Both the countries had attempted to extend their sovereignty over the Kabaw valley considering its richness in forest products”.<sup>120</sup>

The first possible reason was the richness of the forest products in the Kabaw valley. Secondly, Manipur needed the Kabaw valley as a transport route. Manipur was already exporting the timbers to the foreign market through the water-way of Barak river, but it was not a preferable way. Kabaw valley could be functioning as a larger and profitable way to export the forest products. According to Pemberton,

“...imports of timber to British territory through Barak River were very expensive and always prefer to import from the Kubo valley side which was much cheaper”.<sup>121</sup>

Pemberton explained that even though items produced in Manipur were of an exquisite quality the consumption market was limited to local area due to the difficulties of transportation. He pointed out that the Kabaw valley route could be the preferable option as it has better geographical advantages.

“...as the nature of the country precludes the possibility of transporting them to the foreign market, with any prospect of advantage, while for timber of Kubo, the Maglung river offers every facility for floating in into the Ningthee river and thence to the Irrawadee river”.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Pemberton.op.cit.p.46

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.p.13

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.pp.24-30

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.p.

#### 4.7 Innovations and Metallurgy

One of the interesting innovations in the valley was the distillation of water for producing spirit and smelting of iron. Various kinds of spirits were available in the Manipur hills as well as the valley. Manipur hill tribes solely used fermentation of rice and other plants for making spirits while Meiteis in the valley used the process of distillation. Brown has mentioned that a strong spirit like rum was distilled from rice in the Manipur valley.<sup>123</sup> He added that the spirit distilled in the valley was a huge demand among the hill tribes. This distilled spirit was sold at about four annas per quarter bottle.

The only metal that was found in Manipur was iron. It was obtained principally from the beds of small stream, which was in the south of Thoubal and the hill near Langathel. According to Pemberton, the presence of iron in Langathel hill was ascertained by the withered appearance of the grass growing above it. In case of the Thoubal stream, it was generally sought for, after the rainy season, when the soil had been washed away, an iron headed spear was thrust into the ground to attract smaller particles of iron.<sup>124</sup> This implementation of magnetic property acquired by iron, which was previously preserved in the same position for a length of time shows the technological development in this small state. Pemberton said,

“The loss produced by smelting the ore, amounts to nearly 50 per cent, and the Manipuris are perfectly sensible of the difficulty of fusion increasing with the greater purity of the metal. The main articles manufactured were axes, hoes, (for cutting timbers) and ploughshares for agricultural purposes, spear, arrow and daos for warfare. Kokshing lungsae, Kakshing khoonao, Kokshing khullel, and Langathel were main villages at which the iron works were carried on under the direction of a chieftain called Boodhee Raj, who claimed for his ancestors the merit of having first discovered the existence of iron ore in the valley and of rendering it subservient to the use of man”.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Brown. op.cit.p.19

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.p.28

<sup>125</sup> Ibid

It is also recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* that the iron was smelted in Kakching, besides mentioning that various tools were produced there.<sup>126</sup> The iron products such as spear and daos were also mainly bought by the hill tribes.

Few important innovations were wooden mortar, and the winnowing basket which was used for separating chaff from the grain. It is recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* as following.

“Many household items including wooden mortars for pounding paddy and winnowing basket which were carried away by the flood, were collected by the people (from where?)”.<sup>127</sup>

Rohini Kumar and Ranjit believed that Manipur had copper and gold from Sibong village and Kongba Meiramba village respectively. But their suggestion is very problematic since the colonial officers believed that the iron was the only metal found in Manipur. Since concrete evidence proving the existence of copper and gold mines of Manipur were not found in any source, it would be a blunt and hasty conclusion to argue regarding copper and gold in Manipur.

It is clear that Manipur had a water-ways to carry on trades within the state as well as with the neighbouring states. The boat building was another important innovation made by Meitei for the transportations purposes for trading. The entire boat building was under the state supervision. It is recorded that

“Naosom Cha, the *Pukhranpa*, was given the responsible for producing a racing barge made of teak from the region of Nurathempa”.<sup>128</sup>

There were officials called *Hiyangloi Hanjaba* and *Hisaba Hanjaba* who looked after construction and maintenance of the boats.<sup>129</sup> There was a huge demand of boats for transportation as well as for boat races. The boat race festival called *Heeyang* happened

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<sup>126</sup>Parratt. op.cit. *CheitharolKumbaba Vol-2*,p.25

<sup>127</sup>Parratt. op.cit. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.p.109

<sup>128</sup>Ibid.p.96

<sup>129</sup>Rohinikumar and Ranjit.op.cit.p.162

during the month of September. According to Pemberton, the boat building technique was very simple as just hollowing out of a single tree.<sup>130</sup>

#### 4.8 Conclusion

The settlements in Manipur valley grew enormously after water was gradually drained out from the valley through the various rivers. The Meitei kings maintained the activities like dredging of river and digging of canals in order to drain out the excess water from the valley. One of the main important officials whose duty was to make houses and bridges for which they cut down trees and brought other building materials was the *sansaroi*. The settlement of the valley entered a new development phase with the building and connecting of roads to the centre of the Kingdom.

It is clear that land was the main factor of production and surplus generation in the agricultural economy of Manipur. An exploitation of natural resources required major population growth for more human labour. In order to drain the water and perform other state sponsored labour like cultivation and construction of roads, the Meitei king needed a population growth. The problem of the scarcity of labour power was solved by the great effort of the *lallup* system, war captives from the hill areas and immigrants. The Meitei kings made efforts to increase agricultural production throughout the kingdom. The chief advantage of irrigation of rice is that it makes concentration in both population and grain to be possible.

The Meiteis over time acquired advance knowledge regarding the soil of the valley and, with the development of agricultural tools; there was an increase in the agricultural production, which was the essential precondition for a centralized state authority. One of the main introductions was the introduction of *taothabi* rice, which can be grown in a swampy land. The Meitei king also collected the tax in kind from each family, but certain community like the *sellois* paid in *sel* or 'coin'. The amount of rice which each family used to pay varies from two baskets to thirteen baskets per *puree/pari*. In fact the agricultural production and collection of revenue was increased to such an extent that *keis* or 'granaries' were built all over the valley. Subsequently, the *keithels* or

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<sup>130</sup>Brown.op.cit.82

'markets' were also opened in different parts of the valley. One of the main markets was *Sana keithel*, which was a few kilometers away from the king's palace.

Manipur valley is surrounded by ranges of mountains but Barak and Manipur rivers provided a direct route to the eastern part of British India (to the west) and Burma (to the east). There were two land routes that connected the valley with the neighbouring states: in the west, Cachar was the gateway for Assam and Bengal, and in the east, Kabaw valley was the main entrance to Burma. The main items that frequently attracted the trader from the neighbouring states were buffalo, pony, ivory and silk. Internal trade between the valley and the hill was also there. Salt and rice beer were the main items, which the hill people would prefer barter with their chickens and other vegetables.

The medium of exchange was mainly barter system nevertheless *sel* or 'coin' was also used at the time. The shape and the size of coins were varied from time to time according to the wishes of the ruler. There was a frequent conflict between the Manipur kings and the Burmese regarding the possession of Kabaw valley. The reason behind the conflict was the economic potential of the valley, which both the states would like to exploit.

To conclude, the Manipur industrial products was greatly limited. The trade was based on simple availability of raw materials and basic needs of the people and the state. After all, the main economic factors which enabled the formation of Manipur state were surplus from agriculture that came from wet-rice cultivation and trade. In other words, innovation in agriculture became pivotal to Manipur state formation.



## Chapter 5

### The British and State Formation of Manipur

In Manipur history, the period from 1800 to 1890 witnessed a development of a more centralized state under the Meitei kings in Manipur. The integration of the tribal hinterland into the process of state formation was increased considerably. The royal chronicle *Cheitharol Kumbaba* recorded the achievements of Ghambir Singh and glorified him for having achieved a higher status due to the adoption of a new religion. Hinduism was properly cemented in Manipur as the state religion followed by a social hierarchy based on Hindu caste system. The Brahmin enjoyed the status of noble birth in the society and other castes such as Lois, Chakpas were considered the lowest rung of the society. Many of the scholars focusing on the history of Manipur disregarded the important developments of this period in terms of economy and political elements for the process of state formation in Manipur. This was the time when Manipur had a strong relationship with the British East India Company, and this British influences in the making of the Manipur state have been neglected by most of the scholars working on Manipur history.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British East India Company had acquired sovereignty over large tracts of the Indian sub-continent. British territories in India extended to the eastern side upto the farthest limits of Chittagong and Sylhet. At the same time, Burma was becoming more powerful, and the empire of Alaungpaya gradually brought Pegu, Tenasserim, and Arakan under their control, which touched the border of the British frontier, started creating a conflict between British and Burma. Though the British had a commercial relationship with Burma since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, their political conflict began to grow a century later. The conflict was inevitable when the two rising imperialist powers meet at a common frontier. In 1825, it reached a point and the First Anglo-Burma War (1825) was fought between the British and Burma. Why did the British Government help in retaining Manipur's independence from Burma and how the British helped in the state formation of Manipur will be discussed in this chapter.

## 5.1 Relationship with British Before 1824 and First Anglo-Burmese War 1824-25.

After the death of Garibniwas, there was a battle for the throne among the sons of the late king Garibniwas. From 1752 to 1763 there was a constant change in Meitei sovereignty namely Sangkoitapa Bharat Sai (1752), Marampa (1752-1759), Chinthangkomba or Jai Singh (1759-60), then again Marampa (1760-1763). Taking advantage of this conflict and weak period, the Burmese turned their arms against Manipur. During this period there was a series of Burmese invasions.<sup>1</sup> Unable to cope with the frequent Burmese fight, Manipur sought for protection. And during the alternate rule of Jai Singh and Marampa, they asked for the British Government's aid offering to pay a fabulous annual tribute.<sup>2</sup> Thus Manipur had the first diplomatic contact with British in 1762. A Treaty of Verelst was signed between Manipur and British on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1762 in which the aid of a contingent of British East India Company's troops was promised in order to defend the state of Manipur from the Burmese. This treaty was negotiated between Hari Das Gossian, on behalf of his majesty Jai Singh, and Harry Verelst, on behalf of the British.<sup>3</sup> However, the treaty did not go further as an officer with the detachment was recalled after reaching Khasipur, the capital of Cachar.<sup>4</sup> According to McCulloch, the Treaty of Verelst (1762) failed due to bad weather and miscommunication between the Meitei king and the British Government. It is reported that

“No communication appears to have been received from Jain Singh [Manipur King], when the troops destined for the enterprise left Chittagong early in January 1763. Marching by routes along the Eastern Frontier of Bengal, they reached Casspoor, the then capital of Cachar country, in the month of April, when they suffered severely from heavy rain, which had continued to fall from the 21<sup>st</sup> of

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<sup>1</sup>Mc.Culloch, *An Account of Manipur Valley And of The Hill Tribes With a Comparative Vocabulary of The Manipoorand Other Languages*. Bengal Printing Company Limited, Calcutta, 1859. p.7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.p.7.

<sup>3</sup> Home Department, Public Proceedings 1763, pp.1330-1331.

<sup>4</sup> Culloch.op.cit.p.7

March: their progress to Maneepoor was consequence arrested, and finding Casspur unhealthy, they were compelled to return to Jeynugur.”<sup>5</sup>

Sarojini Devi also added a possible reason behind the failed relationship. According to her, the Meitei king agreed to pay annually to the East India Company the expenses of their troops employed in defending Manipur valued around Rs. 56,850, out of which Rs 26,050 was promised to be paid within a month after the arrival of British East India Company’s troops at RaungRaung. However, the amount which was supposed to be paid was not paid.<sup>6</sup> According to Sarojini Devi, it might be possible that the treaty failed because the monetary commitments given by Meitei king were not met.<sup>7</sup> Looking at the earlier statement given by McCulloch, it is possible that the Treaty was unsuccessful partly because of its nonpayment of the tribute, which was supposed to be paid by the king of Manipur, since it is recorded specifically that “there was a miscommunication and nothing was heard from the end of Manipur king” (citation).

After the failure of the British expedition to Manipur, the Burmese invaded Manipur. At this time Bhagyachandra/Jai Singh turned his alliance towards Assam. Jai Singh asked the help from Swargudeo Rajeshwar Raj, king of Assam. The whole journey of Jai Singh taking refuge in Assam and asking help from Swargudeo Rajeshwar Raj to push back Burmese from Manipur was recorded in a puya called *Sree Bhagyachandra Charit*. With the help of the Assam king, Jai Singh successfully drove out the Burmese and ascended the throne of Manipur in 1763. Due to his strong and charismatic leadership, Manipur again retained its peace for awhile till he passed away (1798) leaving five princes Rabeichandra Singh, Modhuchandra Singh, Chourajit, Marjit and Ghambir Singh. After Jai Singh’s death, the history of Manipur presented an unvarying scene of treachery between the numerous sons of Jai Singh in order to claim the throne of Manipur. According to McCulloch, “Jae Sing, better known as ChintungKomba, left many sons, and the history of Munnipore for twenty years after his

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<sup>5</sup> Capt.R.Boileau Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*. Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta.1835.p.41.

<sup>6</sup> Kh.Sarojini Devi, *British Political Agency in Manipur, 1835-1947*. Linthoi Publication, Imphal, 2005.p.8.

<sup>7</sup> ibid

death is a mere account of their struggles for the *guddee* (throne).”<sup>8</sup> Jai Singh was succeeded by Rabeichandra, the eldest son, in 1798. Rabeichandra was murdered and succeeded by his brother Modhuchandra, the third son, who was also killed by his brothers (you mention only one person here) Chourajit Singh. Chourajit was again succeeded by Marjit with the help of the Burmese. The Burmese maintained peace with Marjit for a while but was attacked, and occupied Manipur from 1818 till the end of First Anglo-Burmese War. This period is still known to Manipur as “Chahi Taret Khuntakpa” or “Seven Years of Devastation”.

Burmese occupation of Manipur and certain parts of Assam, Jaintia and Cachar in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century raised a conflict between Burma and the British, which led the British to be concerned over the security of North East Frontier of British India. Pemberton said that the Burmese troops advanced into Assam, and Cachar and was threatening the eastern frontier district of Sylhet.<sup>9</sup> Gunnell Cederlof has also given an opinion that these political changes in Cachar and Manipur were deeply affecting Sylhet district.<sup>10</sup> The British empire in India had extended in the eastern side upto Chittagong and Sylhet. The empire of Alaungpaya gradually expanded their territory towards the North East British frontier. The fall of Arakan to the Burmese army was more alarming to the British eastern boundary of Chittagong. After many disputes over boundary, trade and the capturing of British officers in Maungdaw, finally, on March 1824, war formally broke out between British Empire and the Burmese Empire.<sup>11</sup> The British East India Company anticipated that the Burmese force would march from Manipur and Assam to Cachar for a forward advance, which was really threatening British territory and felt it had to be blocked. The British considered Assam, Manipur, Cachar and Jaintia as strategic operational areas in the western flank for containing Burmese military onslaught. British needed to secure Manipur as an independent country and make it strong in order to maintain the North East Frontier of British India. During the Burmese occupation of

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<sup>8</sup>Culloch, op.cit.p.7.

<sup>9</sup>Pemberton. Op.cit.p.8

<sup>10</sup>Gunnell Cederlof, *Founding an Empire on India's North East Frontiers 1790-1840: Climate, Commerce, Polity*. Oxford University Press, 2014, p.4

<sup>11</sup> B.R Pearn, Arakan and the First Anglo-Burmese War, 1824-25, in, *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol 4, No.1, Nov 1944, pp.27-40.

Manipur, Gambhir Singh made frequent requests for British aid in restoring Manipur, but no aid came till the outbreak of the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1824.

## **5.2 Manipur Levy and Advance Firearms.**

The impact of the conflict between the British and Burma with regard to Manipur state formation was impressive in many ways. Manipur, in the first place, came to the possession of advanced European style firearms. There was also an increase in state revenue, which will be taken up in the latter part of this chapter. In the interval between 1824 and 1825, Gambhir Singh implored British aid against the Burmese. Five hundred Manipuris under Gambhir Singh were furnished with muskets by the British; these muskets were allowed to be retained, and the five hundred men thus formed the nucleus of the Manipur Levy.<sup>12</sup> The combined British and Manipur force attacked the Burmese. By the aid of the artillery, the Burmese were speedily dislodged and beat a retreat beyond the Ningthee River. On the conclusion of the Anglo-Burmese War by the treaty of Yandaboo in 1825, Manipur was declared an independent country.<sup>13</sup>

Firearms, as a crucial element in establishing an empire, has been studied by Iqtadar Alam Khan. In fact, the great empires like the Ottoman empire, the Safavid empire, the Uzbek khanate and the Mughal empire have been characterized by Marshal G.S Hodgson as the “Gunpowder Empires”.<sup>14</sup> However, William Irvine has argued that till the middle of the eighteenth century, the bow and arrow was considered, in India, a much more effective weapon of combat than the musket.<sup>15</sup> Francois Bernier also gave his opinion that the disadvantage of the matchlock was its slow process after a shot.<sup>16</sup> However, according to Iqtidar Alam Khan, in spite of the matchlock’s disadvantage of a time-consuming process after a shot, it could hit much harder with a pallet and be more effective upto a much farther distance, and thus frequency could not be the decisive

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<sup>12</sup>Culloch. Op.cit.p.45

<sup>13</sup>R.Brown, *Statistical Account of Manipur*, A Mittal Publication, New Delhi.2001.p.65.

<sup>14</sup>Iqtadar Alam Khan, Gunpowder and Empire: In Indian case, in, *Social Scientist*, Vol.33, No3/4 (March-April) 2005.

<sup>15</sup>Iqtadar Alam Khan, *Gunpowder and Empire: Warfare in Medieval India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi,2004.p.144

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

factor.<sup>17</sup> Iqtidar Alam Khan further said that the people who had faced a battle against the gun already had an impression of its deadly impact. According to Alam Khan, on one occasion in western India during the 16<sup>th</sup> century a large body of Jat peasants came forward to plunder the travelers but were deterred simply by the display of muskets.<sup>18</sup>

Like many other great empires in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, firearms remained the most vital element in recapturing Manipur and strengthening the process of maturity in state formation of Manipur. Both, the British East India Company and Manipur realized the fact that the weapons Manipur had used during the recent past (before First Anglo-Burmese War) was inferior and outdated to face the powerful Burmese army. According to Lieberman, 29 to 89 percent of KonBaung's field army was well equipped, in terms of firearms, by 1824.<sup>19</sup> Lieberman also said that by that time the Burmese armies had already started using firearms effectively. Burmese were already relying on using muskets and six to twelve pounder canons.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, before the 1824 Burmese War, Manipur's military arts remained very old, traditional and outdated in terms of both weapon and strategy. Their main weapons were spears, bow and arrows, sword and a kind of dart called *arambai*.<sup>21</sup> The *arambai* was mainly used by the mounted men, and it was apparently peculiar to the Meiteis. Further, it is recorded that the Manipuri warfare was not organized, but consisted of acts of vengeance of isolated bodies or individuals.<sup>22</sup> Before the British aid to Manipur, firearms were almost unknown in Manipur. However, Jyotirmoy Roy has an opinion that Manipuris had started using firearms since the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. According to Roy, Manipuris might have learnt the method of making gunpowder from the Chinese who invaded Manipur at the time of Khagemba.<sup>23</sup> Roy's idea of manufacturing gunpowder in Manipur is also supported by Gangumei Kabui.<sup>24</sup> However, Roy's argument became problematic since T.C Hodson said, "Firearms are not made in any form in Manipur till now."<sup>25</sup> Even if

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Alam Khan .op.cit.(2004).p.145

<sup>19</sup> Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels Southeast Asia in Global Context, c 800-1830, Vol.1*. Cambridge University Press, New York. 2003.P.166

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Annual Administrative Report of Manipoor Agency 1868-69.p.55

<sup>22</sup> Culloch, op.cit.p.11.

<sup>23</sup> Roy, op.cit. p.161.

<sup>24</sup> Kabui., op.cit. Glimpses of Land and People of Ancient Manipur. p.11

<sup>25</sup> Hodson, op.cit..p.28

they (Meitei) had firearms, it was very inefficient. The Meiteis had only one hundred matchlocks (which were crudely made out of iron) and some small pieces of artillery (which was a hundred years old).<sup>26</sup>

If Manipur wanted to remain independent, its weapon needed to be seriously improved. Pemberton had recorded in his report that, “Manipur is to be regarded as an advanced military position for the defense of the eastern frontier and its utility much of course entirely depends upon its natural resources and the efficiency of its military force.”<sup>27</sup> Thus the British government took the responsibility of supplying new, advanced firearms and the training of the Manipur Levy under British Officers in order to strengthen their “offensive and defensive” measures towards the North Eastern Frontier of British India.

The presence of Manipur Levy, financed by the British East India Company and commanded by British Officers, within the state had offered a scope for speculation on Manipur’s sovereignty. Due to the involvement of the British, the Manipur king had attained a powerful military army as compared to the earlier period. According to Pemberton, Manipur under Gambhir Singh had enough regular army and enough revenue collection as compared to the size of the state population.<sup>28</sup> Now the estimated revenue collected after the 1826 war was approximately 30,000 Rs. annually.<sup>29</sup> According to Pemberton, regarding the Manipur Levy, “Manipur soldiers were frequently drilled under Major Grant and they are more than a match for an equal number of Burmese in open field.”<sup>30</sup> Manipur cavalry had invariably proved most formidable to the Burmese, and it was the new firearms, given by the British, on which the Manipur Levy relied on with the great confidence.<sup>31</sup> Now, with their (Manipur Levy) formal training under British Officers and modern firearms, the efficiency of the force of Manipur Levy was much stronger than the earlier simple defense of their country. At that time, Manipur Levy consisted of 3000 (men) infantry, 100 cavalry (men) and 100 (men) Galandouz attached

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<sup>26</sup>Annual Administrative Report of Manipoor Agency 1868-69.p.55

<sup>27</sup> Pemberton,op.cit.p.48

<sup>28</sup>Foreign Dept.Political Branch, & Jan 1833. Consultation No.82

<sup>29</sup> Foreign Dept. Political Branch, 7<sup>th</sup> Jan 1833. Consultation No.82,

<sup>30</sup>Pemberton,op.cit.p.49.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.p.50.

to four 3-pounders in the artillery unit.<sup>32</sup> Five to six elephants were used in dragging the artilleries.<sup>33</sup> There were three battalions of infantry consisting of 10 companies each. In lieu of pay, the grants of lands were made out to the soldiers of the Manipur Levy.<sup>34</sup>

The necessity of the Manipur Levy from the British side ended after the annexation of Cachar and the conclusion of the Anglo-Manipur treaty of 1833. It was retained for another year, under British control, for the prevention of any uprising in Manipur, which might follow after the death of Gambhir Singh. Until the death of Gambhir Singh, arms and ammunitions had generally been given free of expense to Manipur but after 1835, the British decided not to furnish any if it was not paid. After one year when it was found that Nar Singh was capable of maintaining peace, the command and responsibility of the Manipur Levy were handed over to the Manipur Government in 1835. Manipur had three thousand infantry, armed with muskets and disciplined on the European model; three thousand artillery and cavalry with four hundred and 10,000 sepoy with spears, daos etc.<sup>35</sup> By this time, the king of Manipur had already 2,750 muskets (new ones) and another 250 more on the way as a gift.<sup>36</sup> Johnstone said that by 1870 there was a huge increase in the numbers of regular armies with regular exercise. Further, in 1872, the British Government presented the Manipur king with five hundred Victoria muskets and twelve sporting rifles for the king and his princes.<sup>37</sup> The sepoy were posted in different areas of Manipur. When necessary or in an emergency a signal of three gunshots collected the whole from the valley and from wherever the sound could be heard.<sup>38</sup> Manipur Levy, in the beginning, was fully supported financially by British government. McCulloch said that these Manipuri sepoy, who were trained by the British officers might have opposed an equal number of Burmese successfully. During the time of McCulloch, the population of Manipur army had increased to 5,400 men.<sup>39</sup> Brown and McCulloch have not given any positive feedbacks regarding the Manipur sepoy. Both of them thought they were useless and felt sorry for the Manipur resources that had been

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<sup>32</sup>Pemberton,op.cit.p.51.

<sup>33</sup>ibid.p.48.

<sup>34</sup>ibid

<sup>35</sup>ibid

<sup>36</sup> Foreign Dept. General Branch. 1865. Progs, Oct. Nos.33-34.

<sup>37</sup> Brown, op.cit p. 73

<sup>38</sup>Culloch, op.cit.p.15.

<sup>39</sup>Annual Administrative Report.op.cit.1868-69.p.54.



spent on maintaining the sepoy. However, on the positive side, Manipur had now a standing army, which was not there earlier. Further, the king now used the state's resources to maintain this army showing that the administration now had changed. By 1890, Manipur soldier consisted of 5800 infantry, 500 artillery, no cavalry and another reserved force consisting of 700 members of the Kuki tribes..<sup>40</sup> There was also an establishment of blacksmiths and carpenters to repair the arms.

The Manipur sepoy became vital in maintaining peace during the Kohima rebellion in 1879 and the Second Burmese War 1885. Manipur sepoy, because of their efficiency and Manipur, being an ally of the British, were used effectively by Johnston (Political Agent 1877-86) in capturing Kohima in 1879. The force furnished by the king of Manipur, was led by Johnston and besieged Kohima, preventing a major catastrophe. The Chief Commissioner visited Manipur and thanked everyone in Manipur for their efforts in maintaining peace at Naga Hills Division. According to Johnston, the Chief Commissioner invested king of Manipur with the star and badge of a K.C.S.I.<sup>41</sup> After the incident of 1891, the Anglo-Manipur War, Johnston expressed his regret saying, "It is grievous to think that his son, the then Jubaraj Soor Chandra Singh, who served us so well was allowed to die in exile and that Thangal Major died on the scaffold: while many others who accompanied the Naga expedition, were transported as criminals across the dreaded "Black water" to the Andamans."<sup>42</sup> Johnston also said the Naga Hill expedition was ignored because of the Afghan War, which was in progress at the same time.<sup>43</sup> According to Johnston, "Manipur sepoy seemed active, hardworking and patient and ready to move at a moment notice. Every man, in addition to his clothes and arms and ammunition, carried a supply of food for several days and all were able to build their own huts on arriving at the halting place, so that no tents were needed."<sup>44</sup> He concluded by saying whatever their (Manipur Sepoy's) defects were, the soldiers of Manipur were much dreaded by the surrounding hill tribes who seemed to regard them as great heroes and treated them with every respect.<sup>45</sup> McCulloch had said that the introduction of

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<sup>40</sup>Annual Administrative Report of Manipoor Agency 1889-90.p.10

<sup>41</sup>Johnston,Op.cit.pp. 157-158.

<sup>42</sup>ibid.p.158.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Annual Administrative Report of Manipoor Agency 1877-78.pp.17-18

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.p.18

European firearms in Manipur had a great impact on the relation between Manipur and its surrounding hill peoples. McCulloch also said, “the Musket makes it an object of terror to the surrounding hill tribes.”<sup>46</sup>

It is clear that the introduction of firearms created a strong impression in the minds of the people around the surrounding hills of Imphal. Lieberman has also said that South East Asians had a tendency to regard firearms as a source of spiritual power, regardless of how well they functioned.<sup>47</sup> Further, the recognition of new firearms as an increasingly effective factor in combat is reflected in the king’s anxiety to retain a large number of firearms. In 1868 there were frequent raids at the Cachar-Manipur border, and Manipur sepoy posted at the Cachar border were troubled many times by the Lushais, Manipur king immediately ordered for more muskets and ammunition.<sup>48</sup> The Manipur king received one thousand more muskets immediately. The possession of a large number of firearms had a great impact on polity and economy of Manipur .

### **5.3 Improvement of roads connecting Manipur, British Territory and Burma**

Roland Pourtier said, “only overland road truly hallmark the appropriation of territory; the material, but also mental, construction of territories relies upon the support of their network.”<sup>49</sup> After 1826, the Manipur kings had started taking an interest in public utility works like roads, rest houses, and bridges. However, the necessity of roads improvement was first pointed out by the British officials, and it was them who took steps towards improving them. The routes that connected Manipur with Sylhet through Cachar, and the route with Burma were seriously considered by the British East India Company. According to Gunnel Cederlof, British East India Company looked at the routes, which passed through Cachar and Manipur, as an important entry point to Burma and the Chinese market.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>McCulloch,op.cit.p.16

<sup>47</sup>Lieberman, op.cit.p. 165.

<sup>48</sup>Annual Administrative Report.op.cit.p.159.

<sup>49</sup>Christopher J. Gray, *Colonial Rule and Crisis in Equatorial Africa: Southern Gabon, 1850-1940*. University Of Rochester Press, Rochester, 2002.p.171.

<sup>50</sup>Cederlof,op.cit.p.4

By the treaty of Yandabo, the road from Cachar to Manipur had to be maintained properly. Earlier, there was also a problem while travelling through the hills of Manipur. The way that connected Manipur and Assam and other countries to the west had to pass through the hills occupied mainly by the Nagas and Kabuis. There were frequent complaints and insecurity, while passing through the hills areas due to frequent extortions by the Kabuis and Nagas. McCulloch said that,

“The intercourse between Mannipore and the more flourishing countries to the westward, was at that time confined to the occasional transit as a few passengers proceeding on pilgrimages to western India and Nuddea, and they were subjected to such extortions by the Kupooee tribe of Nagas occupying the hills of the intervening tract, and incurred such risk of life from the lawless habits and fierce passions of these irresponsible savages, that the journey from Munnipore into Cachar, which is now accomplished with perfect security, was undertaking of the most serious nature, while all were anxious if possible avoid”.<sup>51</sup>

Gunnel Cederlof also said that the trade route that entered eastern Bengal after crossing Cachar, Manipur, Burma, and Yunnan was always at high risk not only because of plain robbery by the hill communities but also the terrain and the monsoon climate in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>52</sup>

The western highway between Cachar-Imphal was the only accessible road that connected Manipur with other neighboring countries located in the western part of Manipur. Brown has given useful information regarding Cachar-Imphal road. According to Brown’s statistics, the length of the road from Cachar to Imphal was 103 miles and the highest point of the road touched 5,800 feet above sea level.<sup>53</sup> This road was improved under the superintendence of Captain (later Colonel) Guthrie of the Bengal Engineers between 1837 and 1844, at the expense of the British Government.<sup>54</sup> It has been reported that till 1865, the road in Manipur was repaired by the British Government at the yearly

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<sup>51</sup> Culloch, op.cit. p.40.

<sup>52</sup> Cederlof, op.cit. pp.2-3

<sup>53</sup> Annual report of 1868-69. p.2

<sup>54</sup> James Johnston, *Manipur and Naga Hills*, p.74

expenditure of around Rs 3000.<sup>55</sup> However, it is not clear whether it included all the roads in Manipur, which included the Manipur-Burma road. On 6<sup>th</sup> November 1865, the Manipur king offered to execute the necessary repairs of the roads in Manipur and the tools, which were in possession of British government, were also handed over to the Raja.<sup>56</sup> Ghambir Singh also improved the roads inside the country for better connectivity with his subjects, e.g. Sugnu road was made for better communication with his subjects living in southern part of the country. After this, an annual inspection of the roads (Cachar-Manipur-Burma) the report on the road became a mandatory job for the political agents in Manipur.

Brown reported that the road from Cachar to Manipur was in better condition as compared to the time he came to Manipur in 1867. In the annual report of 1868-69, it was reported that, "I travelled over the road in the beginning of October last, when the rivers were full because of the heavy rains, without experiencing any ill effect."<sup>57</sup> It is clearly informed that despite extreme weather (heavy rains) that harms the roads, they were generally well maintained even during the rainy days. But the bridges over the rivers on the way were not made of metal so he had asked the British Government for wire ropes for the improvement of bridges. However, Brown's request was not granted. During Johnston's period as a Political agent, the wire ropes were substituted for two cables on which rested the wooden bridges, and the strength of the bridges was greatly increased.<sup>58</sup>

Till 1880 there was no regular road from Imphal to Mao. When Johnstone had gone to Kohima, he had to experience great difficulties in the absence of any road. Hence, realizing the necessity of at least a cart road from Imphal to Mao, he induced the Maharaja to take initiatives in this respect. The construction of the road was completed in January 1881, under the supervision of Lt. Raban R.E. The importance of that road was fully realized during the second Anglo-Burmese War. In course of time, the Imphal-Mao road was further improved and extended up to Dimapur. Formerly traders and pilgrims from Manipur used to travel by the Imphal-Cachar Road. But after the improvement and extension of the Imphal-Mao Road, the Manipuris preferred to travel by this way.

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<sup>55</sup> Annual report of 1868-69.p.7

<sup>56</sup> Political Agent's Letter No.93. 6<sup>th</sup> November 1865.p.1

<sup>57</sup> Annual report of 1868-69.p.8.

<sup>58</sup> Johnston,op.cit.p.75

Consequently, it opened better communication and trade between Manipur and Assam. Johnston also reported about the Cachar road being in excellent condition.<sup>59</sup>

Grimwood, who was the last political agent in Manipur before 1891, also reported regarding the Cachar road that it was in great condition and not only it became wider by clearing jungle but also all the holes, due to heavy rains during the rainy season, were also filled as normal procedure. Even the Tamu road (Manipur-Burma road) was in very fair order. A bridge was built across the river at Pallel and afterwards all the rivers on the way to Burma were bridged properly.<sup>60</sup>

Every year the existing roads were improved, and new ones were made in the valley and hills. Thus Manipur was well connected with Assam, Cachar and Burma. This improved road access brought the hill peoples within the fold of the state and secured a borderland for the state. With the improvement in roads, Manipur started having a healthy trade relationship with Assam and Cachar, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Not only did better roads favour economic growth, but better transport and communication also put a check on the raids and potential rebellions from the hill people.

#### **5.4 Subjugation of Hill Population**

From the early history of Manipur, it has been seen that there were frequent wars and raids among the different clans and the Meiteis with the surrounding hill peoples. The royal chronicles of Manipur claim that some of the the hill peoples might have been under Meitei rule. However as time passed, due to internal and external factors, Manipur had been in trouble frequently, and the Meitei rulers lost their territories especially in the hill areas. As we have seen, Manipur after Garibniwas had frequently been in trouble because of the external (Burmese invasion) and internal rebellion among the sons of kings. These problems had a grave impact on its (Manipur) subjects in the surrounding hill areas. The Burmese invasion of Manipur, which was followed by the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1824, had the same impact. Many hill tribes who were subjugated to Manipur were freed and became independent from Meitei sovereignty. However, after the

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<sup>59</sup>Johnston. p.74

<sup>60</sup>Annual Administrative Report of ManipoorAgency.op.cit. 1889-90.p.5

First Anglo-Burmese War, the scenario had changed due to the advanced and modern fire arms, well trained and disciplined army, proper communication and other various aids which were financed and supported by the British Government. Until his death in 1835, Gambhir Singh was occupied in settling the country, inducing Manipuri refugees to return, and generally regaining and extending Manipur influence over the surrounding hill tribes.

The area of surrounding hill tribes that were subjugated to Manipur had gradually extended since the re-establishment of the Manipur power after the Burmese War of 1824 and was extending to the North Eastern direction although slowly.<sup>61</sup> Some of the tribes might have been subjugated by battles but not all of it. For instance, Khonjai used to give trouble to Manipur. However, their feud against Loosai tribes was exasperating, and finally, they sought protection from Manipur and became subjects of Manipur.<sup>62</sup> Lieutenant Vincent also said, "In every Angami village, there were two parties, one attached to the interest of Manipur and another to the British, but each only working for an alliance to get aid in crushing the opposition factions."<sup>63</sup> However, the territorial expansion of Manipur towards the north ceased to extend after the establishment of the Naga Hills Division in 1866.<sup>64</sup> By 1875 the total areas of hill possessions of Manipur were probably about 7,000 square miles, and the population was roughly around 74,000.<sup>65</sup> There was not any report of major battles or raid by the hill tribes, who were subjected to Manipur, as far as 1891, when Manipur lost its dependence to the British. McCulloch said, "With the assistance of the arms and ammunition given to Manipur by the British government, some of the tribes have been thoroughly, the northern one particularly, reduced and the peace of the frontier has been gained."<sup>66</sup>

It is clear that the introduction of European firearms in Manipur had a deep impact on the relations between Manipur and its surrounding hill peoples. The same thing is also recorded at the Annual Administrative Reports of 1868-1869. The hill people had learned to respect the king's soldiers because of the new firearms. It would have been

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<sup>61</sup>Annual Administrative Report.op.cit.1868-69.p.88.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.p.129.

<sup>63</sup> Mackenzie, History of The North East Frontier . p.112.

<sup>64</sup>Annual Administrative Report.op.cit. 1868-69.p.88.

<sup>65</sup>Brown, Statistical Account Of Manipur Valley.p.5.

<sup>66</sup>McCulloch, An Account of Manipur Valley.p.75

much difficult for the king to restore his sovereignty towards the hill regions if the people in the hill areas had possessed firearms in an efficient manner. However, it was dissolved by the British government by strictly ordering not to sell any arms to the hill peoples. It is recorded in the annual report of 1868-69 that the use of firearms among the hill tribes subjected to Manipur was restricted as much as possible in order to maintain the peace and sovereignty of Manipur in the hill areas.<sup>67</sup> Brown also said that the weapon used by the hill tribes who were subjugated to Manipur remained the same without the efficient use of firearms till 1875.<sup>68</sup>

Till this time, the main weapons of the Hill tribes were spear, dao (they varied in shape, size and length among the tribes), pitfalls, *panjees* or pointed stakes of bamboo, spring arrow, poisonous bow and arrows, especially among the Kukis.<sup>69</sup> However, it was informed that the fear of modern firearms among the hill tribes had been decreasing day after day, and they had also started possessing it and were acquainted with its uses after 1875. It might be because of the lucrative business of European firearms. During 1860 to 1890s there was a large number of illegal arms traffic happening in the North East Frontier of British India. Even some of the British Indian soldier were stealing the firearms from the barracks and selling them to the surrounding hill. It was recorded in 1890 Annual report that ,

“A British Indian sepoy of 40<sup>th</sup> Bengal Infantry was caught selling firearms to a Manipuri and, on another occasion, ten rifles were stolen from the 44<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Light Infantry and two guns and a carbine from Lieutenant Row’s house.”<sup>70</sup>

Efficient use of firearms by the hill tribes against the Manipur authority or British authority in Manipur state was never reported. Despite the rapid rise in illegal arms trade in the North East Frontier during the 1860s among the hill tribes, their effort to raid the travelers/traders or rebel against the king might have been dismantled by various police stations posted in many parts of the hill areas in Manipur after 1826. By 1875 the

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<sup>67</sup> Annual Administrative Report,op.cit.1868-69,p.99.

<sup>68</sup> R Brown , Statistical account of Manipur,p.21.

<sup>69</sup> Annual Adminitraive Report,op.cit.1868-69,p.99.

<sup>70</sup> Annual Administrative Report of Manipoor Agency 1889-90,p.4

Manipur king had established many *thannah* (police station) in the hill areas as well as in the different parts of the valley placing around 20-50 sepoy per station. However, if the area was under frequent trouble from hill tribes, then the king posted more than 100 sepoy. For example, in 1857, the king established *thannah* at Numfau, which was frequently troubled by Sooti tribes, and posted 200 sepoy.<sup>71</sup> Further, after numerous attacks from the Naga Hill Division at the Mao village (who were Manipur's Subject), the *thannah* consisted of 50 sepoy who were posted in the Mao villages. After the matter remained quiet for some time the number of sepoy had been reduced to 20 sepoy. Grimwood also said that, "at every five miles, the Manipuris had *thanahs* for the purpose of keeping a look out against enemies and acting as stages for the dak-runners."<sup>72</sup> HareshwarGoswami listed out certain important police posts in the hill areas, which were responsible for preventing various illegal trades, raids and rebellion plots. They are Palthong post at Koibu (now Chandel District), Chakpi post at Yumadong hill, Chattik post at Yumadong hill (bordering Burma), Jiri post, Kalanaga stockade, Kangkum post (Ukhrul District), Khoupamstockade, Kongal post, Mao post, Nasinga post, Numfow post and Prowi post.<sup>73</sup> According to Goswami, most of the posts consisted of one *subedar*, one *havildar* and 40 to 50 sepoy.<sup>74</sup>

As we have seen after the treaty of Yandabo, the safety of the road from Manipur to Cachar was maintained with perfect security with the modern firearms and disciplined sepoy who were trained by the British officials.<sup>75</sup> McCulloch also said that the construction of a magnificent road from Cachar to the Manipur valley and its proper maintenance by the British Government had added to the advantages of subjugating the Kabuis and also it considerably increased the trade and commerce with the west.<sup>76</sup> The Nagas were subject to the king of Manipur, and they paid tribute annually to the king of Manipur.<sup>77</sup> Thus the century old process of territorial extension of the Meithei kingdom, towards the hill area was finally completed. By 1874, it has been recorded that there was

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<sup>71</sup> Annual Administrative Report, op.cit. 1873-74, p.6.

<sup>72</sup> Saint Clair Grim Wood, *My Three Years Experience in Manipur*. Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2008, p.22

<sup>73</sup> Goswami, Hareshwar, *History of the People of Manipur*, Kangla Publication, Imphal, 2004, pp.44-50

<sup>74</sup> *ibid*

<sup>75</sup> Culloch, op.cit, p.40.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p.40

<sup>77</sup> Foreign Dept. Political Branch, Consultation No.109-120, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1832.



no complaint of any life threatening raids or extortion by the hill people, but now the extortion was done by the *thanadar* of the police station.<sup>78</sup>

### **5.5 Political Agent in Manipur and relationship between Manipur and Burma**

The relationship between Manipur and Burma had always seen its ups and downs throughout the early history of both the countries. During the time of Garibniwas, Burma was frequently raided by Manipur. The situation had changed after the death of Garibniwas. Due to the internal rift among the princes, Manipur was frequently in chaos, and Burmese took advantage of this chaotic state and took the opportunity to invade Manipur several times. The British government was not unaware of this situation.

After the First Anglo-Burmese War, in order to preserve the relationship between the British and Manipur, as well as to prevent the border feuds and disturbances between Manipur and Burma, the British East India Company realized the necessity to retain an officer in the form of a Political Agent. Lieutenant Gordon (former adjutant of the Manipur Levy), who was aware of the area (Manipur), and with his field experience in the area, had been brought favorably by British Government and he was appointed as a political agent in Manipur in 1835.<sup>79</sup> The political agent was put directly under the British government. All the communication between the British Government was done through the political agent. The political agent came to be placed under the Chief Commissioner of Assam in 1874. The following were the instruction as conveyed to Brown, “The Viceroy and Governor-General in Council directs me to state, for your

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<sup>78</sup>Annual Administrative Report of Manipur Agency for the Year 1874-1875.p.7.

<sup>79</sup>Names of Political Agents in Manipur till 1891

Capt. Gordon 1835- 1844

Major McCulloch. 1844-1862

Dr. Dillion. 1862-1863

Major McCulloch. 1863-1867

R.Brown. 1867-1875

G.H. Damant. 1875-1877.

James Johnston. 1877-1886

Major Trotter. Six weeks only

St.C. Grimwood. 1888-1891.

information and guidance, that, all matters of a purely political nature affecting the internal affairs of Manipur, or the relation of Munnipoor to Burmah or to foreign tribes, you will continue to correspondence with this office.”<sup>80</sup>

The relationship between the political agent and Manipur government did not start very well due to the treaty of 1835 that cost Manipur the Kabaw Valley. According to the treaty, Kabaw valley was handed over to Burma, and the Manipur king was given Rs.6000 annually in compensation. However, this monetary compensation lasted only until 1891.<sup>81</sup> The loss of Kabaw Valley to Burma impacted not only the king but also the people of Manipur. Further, according to Sarojini there was another problem, which had made the unpleasant response from Manipur towards the British political agent in Manipur in the beginning. According to her, “In 1835, a serious difference of opinion appeared between the two governments over the issue of appointment of a regent to the minor Raja, Chandrakirti Singh. T.C Robertson, the agent to the Governor General, strongly recommended Maharani Kumudini, the widow of Raja Gambhir Singh for appointment as Regent. The Government of Manipur, on the other hand, recorded the services of Nara Singh, the brother of Gambhir Singh, and wanted to make him regent. The British proposal was not acceptable to the Manipuris as they had no custom of the state being ruled by a woman.”<sup>82</sup>

The political agents also started interfering in the internal administration of Manipur and had a very effective impact on the Manipur Government. The power and the responsibility of the political agent had increased as a result of certain suggestions and developments made by the strong personalities of incumbents to the post. John stone has also mentioned that a healthy political relationship between Manipur and British government and the development on Manipur’s end was largely dependent on personal influences of an individual Political Agent and lasted only while he remained. All the political agents posted in Manipur were also not all well-regarded amongst the Manipuris. Even though the relationship between the British and Manipur was not very healthy as a result of losing Kabaw valley to Burma, Captain Gordon (the first Political Agent) was

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<sup>80</sup> Annual Administrative Report of Manipoor Agency 1873-74.p.18

<sup>81</sup> Johnston.op.cit.p.90

<sup>82</sup> Sarojini,op.cit.p.41.

respected and remembered because of his service in the Manipur Levy. He also introduced English vegetables and fruits in Manipur.<sup>83</sup>

The political agents after Captain Gordon might have done their duty very well but their efforts to develop the state were not visible and not appreciated by the people. In 1844, McCulloch was appointed as Political Agent in Manipur. McCulloch had been known for his duty and effort for maintaining peace and development in Manipur. According to Johnston, McCulloch was the one who repeatedly urged the British Government to uphold the king of Manipur and to resist and punish any party who tries to dispossess the king of Manipur.<sup>84</sup> In fact, the British Government came with approval of his letter and decreed was issued, in 1851, to resist and punish those who attempted to overthrow the king of Manipur. McCulloch's greatest accomplishment was regarding the Kuki settlement in Manipur. According to Johnston, "Kuki are a wandering race consisting of several tribes who had long working up from the south. They were first heard of as Kukis, in Manipur, between 1830 and 1840"<sup>85</sup> The new immigrants began to cause anxiety about the year 1840, and soon poured into the hill tracts of Manipur in such numbers, as to drive away many of the older inhabitants. McCulloch realized the problem at hand. Nar Singh handed over the management of the Kukis to McCulloch. He soon realized Kukis were looking to secure land for cultivation and he settled them down by allotting them lands in different places according to their numbers, and where their presence would be useful on an exposed frontier. He advanced them large sums of money from his own pocket to settle them, and assigned them duties like working as irregular Manipur soldiers, carrying loads and many others like employing them for road maintenance and etc. Thus many of the Kukis were settled down as peaceful subjects of Manipur.<sup>86</sup> The Manipur king used the irregular Kuki militia in the Kohima expedition, which was maintained till 1891 (as we have seen earlier in this chapter).

In 1861, the Civil Finance Commission proposed the abolition of the Political Agent in Manipur. But the immediate consequence was the tension between Manipur and Burma, which led to the blockade of existing trade between the two countries. Then the

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<sup>83</sup> Johnston.op.cit.p.93

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.p.45

<sup>86</sup>ibid

proposal was dropped in order to maintain the peace between Manipur and Burma. McCulloch was again resumed as a political agent in Manipur. When he reached Imphal, the capital of Manipur, the whole state came out to meet him and he was received with acclamation by the Rajah.<sup>87</sup>

Another officer whose work was widely respected by Manipur was James Johnston. The relationship between Manipur and Burma was the main reason that the British government had placed a Political Agent in Manipur. It was under Johnstone's supervision that the relations between Burma and Manipur finally settled with the boundary feuds being settled properly after the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1885. In 1881 he was appointed as Commissioner for settling the boundary between the two states.<sup>88</sup> He also established a school near the palace in Imphal, which is now known as Johnstone Higher Secondary School. A hundred male students were enrolled in the school during 1889-90.<sup>89</sup>

It was the political agent who helped in settling the physical boundary of Manipur state and the feuds with Burma. R.B. Pemberton observed, "The territories of Muneepoor have fluctuated at various times with the fortunes of their princes, frequently extending for three or four days' journey east beyond the Ningthee or Khyendwen river, and west to the plains of Cachar".<sup>90</sup> Sir James Johnstone also observed that, "The territories of Manipur varied according to the mettle of its rulers. Sometimes they held a considerable territory east of the Chindwin River in subjection, at other times only the Kubo Valley, a strip of territory inhabited not by Burmese, but by Shans. At one time the eastern boundary of Manipur extended up to the peripheral limits of China and Burma, while the south-sea remained as the southern boundary and Hiramba's Kingdom (Dimapur) as the northern boundary".<sup>91</sup> Alexander Mackenzie also supported this account. Towards the west the boundary of Manipur, although not properly defined, as referred in the treaty of 1763, was extended upto the Brahmaputra Valley. But after 1824 the territorial map of Manipur was recognized with the help of British. The most serious claim was that of Gambhir Singh, who applied for a lease of Cachar for 20 years on an annual tribute of Rs.

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<sup>87</sup>ibid

<sup>88</sup> Johnstone.p.180

<sup>89</sup> Annual Administrative Report,op.cit. 1889-90.p.6.

<sup>90</sup> Pemberton. Op.cit.p.87

<sup>91</sup>Johnstone. Op.cit.123

15,000. His claim was supported by Captain Grant, Commissioner of Manipur, but seriously opposed by Captain Jenkins and Lieutenant Pemberton. Lord William Bentinck decided in favour of annexation. A hilly tract in the eastern part of Cachar was given to Gambhir Singh, the plains were annexed on August 14th, 1832, and formed a district.<sup>92</sup> The Government of Bengal finally resolved to transfer the tract east of the Jiri River between the two branches of the Barak River, over which he had already extended his influence. In 1886 the territorial extent of Manipur was confined to the two hill ranges, the Kalanga Range and Noonjai Range which were situated between the eastern and the western banks of the Barak. Thus the line of Jiri and the western bank of the Barak formed as the territorial boundary of Manipur in the west, in the eastern boundary Kubo valley (which was given to Burma at 1834), in the North Mao Gate and in the south Sugunu had been considered as the last village under the authority of Manipur king.<sup>93</sup> However, the southern boundary was never settled properly due to the frequent raid by Lushai tribes. According to Brown, “Loosai tribe of Kookies became more powerful and devastated the country in that direction [southern part of Manipur].”<sup>94</sup>

## 5.6 Internal Conflict

While the advantages of immunity from foreign aggression and surrounding hill tribes had been fully appreciated, the benefit derived from internal peace had not been fully acknowledged till 1850. Every male member of the royal family, no matter how distant he might be from reigning family, always found out a way to accomplish their wish to sit on the throne of Manipur. If the throne was not to be gained by fair means, then it was to be won by rebellion. Thus, numerous as they were (princes and other royal family members), there were frequent revolutions which handicapped the peace of the small country.

On the death of Gambhir Singh, Nar Singh who was a senapati during Gambhir's reign, found himself to be the most powerful man in Manipur. However, Nar Singh put Chandrakirti, an infant son of Gambhir Singh, on the throne of Manipur. Nar Singh

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<sup>92</sup> Foreign Dept. Political Branch, Consultation No.60-62, 24<sup>th</sup> Sept 1832.

<sup>93</sup> Brown, Op.cit.p.4.

<sup>94</sup> Annual report of 1868-69.p.85

conducted the duties with ability and firmness, and he became regent. However, the more Nar Singh evinced his fitness to rule, the more was he hated by the young king's mother. The king's mother saw Nar Singh as an obstacle to the young king and her ambition was to remove Nar Singh out of her way. So she made a plot to murder Nar Singh, the regent. In January 1844, she continued the plot accordingly to murder Nar Singh. In this event, Nar Singh narrowly escaped with his life after having been severely wounded. The king's mother, fearing the consequences of a miscarriage of her plot, fled to Cachar (Cachar was under British India at the time) with the young king Chandrakirti. Now the throne was taken possession by Nar Singh and he ruled the country till his death in 1850. Nar Singh was succeeded by his brother Debendro Singh. While Debendro Singh was preparing for the ceremony of "PhambalKaba" or "Ascending the throne", Chandrakirti, attacked the palace of Manipur and overthrew Debendro Singh from the throne. Debendro Singh with his few followers fled to Cachar. Debendro Singh ruled the country for barely three months.

After a few days, Chandrakirti reoccupied the throne of Manipur, a young brother of Debendro Singh, who had fled with his brother from the palace of Manipur, united with Nar Singh's sons and with 600 followers attacked the palace of Manipur. But they were defeated and again fled to Cachar.<sup>95</sup> Debendro Singh made his first attempt to take over the throne after two months of his flight to Cachar but was unsuccessful. Another attempt was also made soon after, but they were dispersed even before reaching Manipur.<sup>96</sup>

Manipur had been a victim of internal conflicts between the members of the royal family quite a few times in its history. In fact, the last Burmese occupation of Manipur was also because of this internal rift among the royal families. In fact, this conflict among the ruling family affected the people of Manipur in general. Section of people showed their royalty to the one group of the royal family while other section showed their allegiance to the other family of ruling class, which lead to the proper malfunction of the state machinery. Taking the advantages of the political scenario, Burmese frequently attacked Manipur during late 18<sup>th</sup> which crumbled the existing trade of the country. In

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<sup>95</sup>Annual Administrative Report.op.cit. 1868-69.p.69.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

fact Hodson suggested that the lack of artistic and industrial activities earlier before they arrived was due to Burmese repetitive raids and captivation of famous manufacturers.<sup>97</sup> The British Government was well aware of this fact but British East India Company was mostly worried about Burmese interference in the British Northeast Frontier. In order to curb the problem of internal conflict, on third October, 1851 the British Government brought out the decree against princes and other royal family members, who were taking shelter in Cachar, and surrounding hill tribes. The decree was as follows: "His Honor in Council, therefore authorizes you to make a public avowal of the determination of the British Government to uphold the present Raja and to resist and punish any parties attempting hereafter to dispose him."<sup>98</sup> However, Debendro was not listening to the order and plots were being made for another attack on Manipur to capture the throne. Debendro Singh was seized by the British from Cachar and conveyed first to Sylhet and afterwards to Dacca, where he was given a compensation of Rs. 70 per month.<sup>99</sup> After this incident, the sending of Debendro Singh to Dacca, the throne of Manipur was saved from constant internal rift among the royal families and no such attempt to overthrow the ruling king was reported till 1891 when Manipur lost its independence to the British Government.

## 5.7 Trade and Commerce

The available evidence suggests that the state was not only paid in kind but also received revenues mostly in kind and service. The surplus, therefore, largely took the form of labour rent by the ruling class. We have also seen the long distance trade between Manipur and its neighbouring kingdoms, like Tripura, Assam, Cachar and Burma before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the important items of trade, as we have seen earlier, were elephants and horses and the trade in the former item was exclusively a royal monopoly. As we have seen earlier that the economy of Manipur was mainly agrarian economy and the medium of exchange was more of barter system. But with the increase in commerce and intercourse with the more developed regions of British territories and, most importantly, the need to buy arms and ammunitions, the want of money revenue which

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<sup>97</sup> Hodson op.cit. *The Meiteis*. P. 29.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.* p. 75.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* p. 69.

was earlier mainly ignored became a main concern of the state. In order to maintain military efficiency in maintaining peace with Burma or the surrounding hills, the king needed to buy sufficient arms and ammunitions from the British Government. In a report of 1875-76, it is recorded that, “a large quantity of ammunition, viz, 50 maunds gunpowder, 200 maunds of lead, three lakh percussion caps, and Rupees 400 worth of cartridge paper had been bought by the king. The whole cost of above ammunition was valued at Rupees 5,091-2. The cost was agreed to be paid back in three installments within one year.”<sup>100</sup> Thus, an improved fiscal system was needed in order to maintain their sovereignty. Earlier, the structure of the trade had improved with the improvement of roads and the king’s use of his power for better governance. However, as the time went by trade might have become a primary source for maintaining arms and ammunition.

One of the main improvements in Manipur was the levying of customs duties on all articles imported into the state and on some exported articles to British territories. In fact, Johnstone had said that one of the grievances that British India had against Manipur was the levying of customs duties on all articles imported into the state and exported from the state to British territories.<sup>101</sup> These duties supplied almost the only money revenue the Maharaja had, and also to some extent protected Manipur industries.<sup>102</sup> As we have seen, the Meithei paid very little in cash. All the land belonged to the king and every holding paid small quantities of rice each year, and chief form of payment was the system of lallup. Johnstone regulated the system of customs duties by reducing the rate on all the imports and higher rate on certain export materials mostly clothes. Johnstone even said that there was a competition between the imported cloths and exported cloths, which he termed as excellent manufactures of Manipur. The political agent had furnished an account of taxes levied on goods imported and exported for one year in Manipur in 1868-69.

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<sup>100</sup> Annual Administrative Report of 1875-76.p.8

<sup>101</sup> Johnstone.op.cit.p.111

<sup>102</sup> Johnstone.op.cit.p111.



Imports from Cachar.

Items	Tax Levied		
	Rs.	Ana	Paisa
Betelnut and Pan	721	8	0
Cloth	562	13	0
Yarns	203	6	3
Brass and other metals	228	7	0
Hukas	206	15	0
Miscellaneous	52	5	9

Export from Manipur to Cachar

Items	Tax levied		
	Rs	Ana	Paisa
Cloths	505	14	0
Yarns	127	3	6
Manipur Buffaloes	1,500	0	0
Burma Buffaloes	500	0	0
Manipur Ponies	900	0	0

Brown said it was impossible to get the exact revenue realized from the Manipur inhabitants, but it was estimated that between twelve to fifteen thousand per annum at 1868-69.<sup>103</sup>

Timber from Manipur, one of the most valuable items of the time in maritime trade, became the primary element of British interest. Other items that the British were interested in included bamboo and cane. Grant even mentioned that finest bamboo came

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<sup>103</sup>Brown .Op.citp.89

from Manipur.<sup>104</sup> The Meitheis also began manufacturing certain items which were not available before, like leather works, first rate cotton carpets, and boots, shoes and saddles based on English designs.<sup>105</sup> Johnstone described that the carpenters who were working for the king of Manipur became tolerably good workman. This group great progress in the art during the last few years that the demand for this group of labour had increased in other high class family (Johnston didn't described properly which class of family it was).<sup>106</sup> This reputation of fine Manipuri carpenters had continued even after 1891. According to Hodson, Manipuri's carpentry was very famous in the adjoining province of Cachar and Sylhet.<sup>107</sup> Hodson even said, "Manipuris were capable of turning out first rate work and can imitate English work successfully."<sup>108</sup>

One of the most profitable items for the triangular trade between Cachar-Manipur-Burma was Manipuri ponies. According to Gunnel Cederlof Manipur was known to its neighboring countries for her ponies, salt, silk, ivory and cotton.<sup>109</sup> The tax levied from Manipur ponies was earlier Rupees 20 per head, but was increased, in 1873, to Rupees 23-4 to 23-8.<sup>110</sup> The Manipuri ponies were so much in demand that, in 1877-78, the valley had almost been drained of all its ponies by their export and the pony trade was halted until the numbers had increased again.<sup>111</sup> The next lucrative item was Manipuri buffaloes. The tax on a buffalo brought from Burmah was only two Rupees and it was increased to four Rupees but the tax on Manipuri buffalo was fixed at ten Rupees.<sup>112</sup> During the time of McCulloch itself, due to the better roads and better security, export trade of buffaloes alone increased from Rs.30,000 to 50,000 annually.<sup>113</sup> The buffalo trade between Cachar, Manipur and Burma was so profitable that in 1876-77 the trade between Manipur and Burma was shut because of border feuds between the two countries, however Burmese traders often managed to smuggle them across the border despite the risk of heavy

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<sup>104</sup> Foreign Dept. Political Branch, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1832. Consultation No. 113

<sup>105</sup> Johnstone p.187.

<sup>106</sup> Annual Administrative Report.op.cit. 1877-78.p.8

<sup>107</sup> T.C Hodson, *The Meitheis*, Low Price Publication, New Delhi, 1999.p.28

<sup>108</sup> *ibid*

<sup>109</sup> Cederlof.op.cit.p.46.

<sup>110</sup> Annual Administrative Report.op.cit 1873-74.

<sup>111</sup> Johnstone.p.111

<sup>112</sup> Annual Administrative Report op.cit.1868-69.p.47

<sup>113</sup> Mc,Culloch. An account of Manipur Valley.p.40

punishment.<sup>114</sup> In 1890 the numbers of buffaloes exported from Manipur to Cachar had increased immensely from 486 (in 1886-87) to 787, which excluded 31 Burmese Buffaloes. Other items consisted of tea seed, cloths, iron (mostly to the Naga Hills).<sup>115</sup> As the Meitei king opened posts in different areas of the hills and reinforced these posts with new weapons, they began to have control over the raiding hill communities and thereby were able to maintain the trade routes for strengthening the economy of the country.

Chandrakirti started having an interest in the development of trade by using his available sources like materials for constructing bridges and using people. The prisoners were freely employed by the king for maintaining roads and other manual works related to public utility.<sup>116</sup> As we have seen, during his time, everyday new roads were being made and even though bridges were not made with iron, but they were quite fit for traffic and most of them had wooden bridges which was strong enough to carry goods laden cattle.<sup>117</sup> Rest house for travelers, who were travelling from Cachar to Manipur, began to be built in 1873 under the consultation of Brown and Thangal (who was Major General). Further, in order to strengthen the economy of the country, Chandrakirti hold a monopoly on two articles i.e tea seed and Indian rubber.<sup>118</sup> However, Chandrakirti's claim of monopoly on these two items was against the agreement or treaty signed between Ghambir Singh and Commissioner F.J Grant in 1835. According to the treaty,

“The Raja will, in no way, obstruct the trade carried on between the two countries by Bengali or Manipuri merchant. He will not exact heavy duties, and will make monopoly of no articles of merchants whatsoever.”<sup>119</sup>

It is also clear that the British Government was also not pleased with the levying of customs duties on all the articles. This shows Chandrakirti's drive to manifest his sovereignty and to strengthen the economy of the state. According to Rhodes and Bose, there was a huge demand of Manipur's tea seeds from Cachar due to the increase in tea

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<sup>114</sup> Annual Administrative Report.op.cit. 1877-78.p.8

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.* and, Annual Reports of 1889-90.p.7

<sup>116</sup> Annual Administrative Report.op.cit.1868-69.p. 45.

<sup>117</sup> *ibid*

<sup>118</sup> Annual Administrative Report.op.cit. 1873-74.p.16

<sup>119</sup> Appendix XV, Agreement Between Rajah Gumbheer Singh and Commissioner F.J Grant,1835, in NaoremSanajaoba (edt), *Manipur Past and Present: Heritage and Ordeals of a Civilization*. Vol.1.p.466

gardening.<sup>120</sup> The price of the tea seeds per *maund* (40 seers or 37 kg) varied from rupees seventy to rupees eighty.<sup>121</sup> Rhodes and Bose further suggested that this lone fact, of lucrative tea seeds from Manipur, might have been sufficient to attract the British Government to extend their authority over Manipur.<sup>122</sup>

Brown said that the system of exacting labour from hill tribes was excellent and had salutary effects.<sup>123</sup> By 1889, the Manipur king had increased the house tax of the hill tribes from Rs.2.8 to Rs. 3 annually, which was a harsh imposition on the hill subjects.<sup>124</sup> In the same year, a Kuki was imprisoned for two years for not paying Rs.10 in revenues.<sup>125</sup> It shows how vital the fiscal system had become in Manipur. There was a transition from self-sufficient state to a state of acquisitiveness.

During this interval of peace, Manipur had increased in population and wealth. McCulloch said “to assist traders and encourage trade had been his constant endeavour, and though his success had not been achieved as much as he could wish, still an improvement had taken place.”<sup>126</sup> Araja’s agent was also posted in Cachar who was responsible for giving passes to travelers to enter Manipur. He was given sole responsibility to inspect the reason for travelers to enter Manipur and to inspect the items that were exported and imported to Manipur.<sup>127</sup>

It appears that the economy of Manipur had considerably improved under the advice of the political agents. Due to the surplus generation, there was an increase in the pace of circulation of coins in Manipur. On one occasion, during the period of Johnstone as a political agent, there was an uproar and business ceased because of the collection of large amount of *sels* by some families.<sup>128</sup> Then the king (Chandrakriti) issued large quantity of *sel*. Earlier the usual rate of a rupee was 480 *sels*. However, after this incident, an exchange rate of a rupee was reduced to 240 *sels* and was fixed in Manipur till

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<sup>120</sup>N.G. Rhodes and S.K. Boss, Coinage and Economy of The Meitei Kingdom, in, J.B. Bhattacharjee (ed) *State and Economy in Pre-colonial Manipur*. Akansha Publication House, New Delhi,2010,p.60

<sup>121</sup>ibid

<sup>122</sup>ibid

<sup>123</sup> Annual Administrative Report,op.cit.1868-69.p.23

<sup>124</sup> Annual Administrative Report,op.cit.1889-90.p.1

<sup>125</sup> Ibid p.4

<sup>126</sup>Mc.Culloch, An Account Of Manipur Valley.p.37

<sup>127</sup> Annual Administrative Report,op.cit. 1868-69.p. 157

<sup>128</sup>Johnstone.op.cit.p.115

1891.<sup>129</sup> Here, one of the most interesting points is the collection of a large quantity of *sels* by few families, which undoubtedly implies that there was a development of private property in Manipuri society. However, the social stratification based on private property was not clearly visible at the time. This may be because of the lack of sources.

## 5.8 Conclusion

During the First Anglo-Burmese War, there were lots of challenges to the state of Manipur. Manipur had attained its first standing army in the form of the Manipur Levy. Manipur's infantry force became increasingly focused on firearms, which were supplied by the British Government. Manipur king started realizing the effectiveness of the modern firearms, so the Manipur's ancient warfare had changed into modern warfare. As the use of firearms spread, so did the effects on the political and economic system. With the help of superior firearms, Manipur consolidated the hill areas permanently, which had been lost during the Burmese occupation of Manipur from 1819 to 1824.

Manipur appeared to be basically agrarian in character, and the land revenue was the main source of income of the state. However, things had changed after 1835, land revenue appropriated by the king might not form a sufficient basis to support a state financed to maintain its roads, bridges, but mainly arms and ammunition. Manipur might have traded from the early period, but the proper channel of trade was established with cash revenue on the export and import items only after 1826. Further, state revenue was supported by tribute in cash or plunder from feudatories who were generally from the surrounding hills.

It is clear that British intended to strengthen the power of Meitei king to be able to enhance their own interests. Considering the geo-political position of Manipur, supporting the power of Meitei king would have been an efficient and convenient way to maintain the power of the British over the Northeast frontier. To reduce the threat from Burma, the British had to maximize the function of the Meitei rulers as part of the strategy. This strategy inevitably amplified the reinforcements of the Meitei king, which became fundamental to bringing about the stability of the Manipur state. An important

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid.

aspect of the history of Manipur state formation has therefore been the introduction of modern firearms which re-asserted the authority of the state bringing about peace, better communications and to a large extent, the development of trade.

## Conclusion

The history of state formation of Manipur was a long and complicated process, which should be analysed through various dimensions. Amongst many facets of that procedure, this dissertation has focused on the following factors. Firstly, the political aspect was contemplated. The process of the creation of a 'Kingship' and the socio-political organization of the Meitei kingdom was one of the vital points to be noticed for understanding the state formation of Manipur. Secondly, religious changes in the Meitei kingdom from the advent of Hinduism were traced through the primary sources including the royal chronicles of Manipur. Thirdly, the economic structure of Manipur before the first Anglo-Burmese War was explained. Lastly, the British influence on state formation of Manipur was demonstrated. Each dimension mentioned above should be observed carefully considering the importance and complexity of them.

The socio-economic, political and administrative initiatives of the Ningthauja clan were leading factors resulting in the emergence of state formation in early Manipur. Under the leadership of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba who was the chief of Ningthaujas, seven chiefdoms of different clans namely, Angom, Khuman, Luwang, Khaba, Moirang, and Mangang were unified into the Meitei Kingdom. This amalgamation of seven clans, which previously existed as chiefdoms came to form the single socio-political unit called the Meitei. This process of unification took centuries of wars as there was resistance and rivalry among the clans. Khaba and Moirang were the strongest chiefdoms that consistently challenged the sovereignty of the Meiteis. Records of the royal chronicles of Manipur and *BhagyachandraCharitshow* various incidents of fighting between these two chiefdoms and the Meiteis. Khaba came under the control of the Meitei during Kyamba's reign in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Even after Khaba became part of the Meitei fold, the Moirangs continued resistance till the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

After the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1825, the Meiteis were able to consolidate their position by incorporating Moirang during the reign of Gambir Singh. The rulers prior to Gambir Singh had also attempted to extend the territory of kingdom towards the surrounding hills. Nevertheless, under them total subjugation was never possible since most of those tribal chiefdoms maintained their independent governing system. The tribute system existed as a mechanism of keeping Meitei-

centric orders of Manipur. As tribal communities offered certain forms of tribute in kind, the Meitei rulers had to accept their existence as separate political units. However, after the First Anglo Burmese war, Ghambir Singh finally managed to control a large section of hill areas in Manipur.

The territorial boundary of the Meitei kingdom was constantly in flux until 1834. However, with the agreement of 1834 signed between Gambhir Singh, the British East India Company and Burma the borders between Manipur and Burma were fixed. Manipur lost the Kabaw Valley to Burma, which is still the reason for resentment among the Meiteis. The origin of the present boundary line of Manipur state can be traced back to the border settlement on 1834.

Since Meitei became a mono-political community as a kingdom, the socio-political system of Manipur transitioned into a permanently settled agricultural society even as the establishment of a more centralized kingdom came to require it. Due to geographical conditions of the valley, Meitei kings needed human resources to expand the agrarian settlement. Considering the environmental condition and the level of farming skills, the agricultural industry of that era inevitably depended on the labour intensive methods. In this context, the idea of "concentration of manpower" was not only about bringing more people in the valley but also about how to mobilize and utilize them. The following reasons initiated the population growth, which was one of the primary keys for the "concentration of manpower". One case was through the war captives. The Meitei Kingdom was in the growth phase, which means there were frequent wars for territorial expansion. As a consequence of this expansion, war captives were consistently provided. The other case was the immigration from the neighbouring countries. Brahmins and Muslims from the neighbouring countries constituted the majority of immigrants.

The settlement in Manipur valley grew explosively after the irrigation system became regularised. Meitei kings managed the irrigation system successfully; dredging of river and digging of canals were the main task of this project. An exploitation of natural resources requires massive population growth for concentrated human labour. For draining the water and performing other state sponsored labour such as cultivation and construction of roads, the Meitei kings needed to increase the population. The Meitei kings endeavoured to increase agricultural production throughout the kingdom. The irrigation of rice made the concentration of both population and grain.



Manipur was an agrarian country. The whole land of the Manipur belonged to the king and it was under his whim either to give away or retain the land as he pleased. Each male member of the society who was liable to work, under the system of *lallup*, was granted a *puree/pari* ('measurement of areas' which is more or less equivalent to three acres) of land. There was a post titled the *Phunan Salungba* and officers of this post had a duty of superintending all matters connected with land cultivation like land measurement, receiving rent etc. The tax in kind was collected by the king from his subjects. The tax collected by the state was liable to many modifications. Nonetheless, the tax varied from two baskets to thirteen baskets from a *puree/pari* of land. There was a particular community called *selloi* in the valley who paid their taxes to the state in coins or *sels*, while the rest paid it in kind. Hill people also paid their tributes or taxes in kind such as wax, cotton, cloths and ivory. These articles were the main items of tribute paid by the hill tribes. There were various incidents regarding the punishment of certain communities or areas because of the non-payment of their tributes. For example, *Chingsong* community paid *phipongchami* (a kind of cloth) as a tribute to the Meitei king. *King Tapungpa* devastated *Chingsong* because of the non-payment of tribute to the state store-house.

Generally speaking, the location of the Manipur was far from advantageous. Ranges of mountains surround Manipur. This unfavourable environmental condition affected the nature of the economy of the state. Although Barak and Manipur rivers provided direct routes to the eastern part of British India (to the west) and Burma (to the east) regarding exporting the rice and forest product, the range of trade with the neighbouring states was greatly limited due to the reasons mentioned above. The limited industrial products were based on the simple availability of raw materials and basic needs of the people and the state. The main economic factor, which enabled the formation of Manipur state was surplus from agriculture that came through wet-rice cultivation and trade. In other words, innovation in agriculture became pivotal to Manipur state formation.

One of the noticeable features of Manipur in the process of early state formation is the system called as *lallup*. The *lups* and the *lallup* system were the principal axes for the organisation and administrative system of Manipuri society. According to the *Lallup* system, all the Meitei males were supposed to work for the state for ten days, every forty days during the time of peace while servicing days during the time of war was limitless. Every man whose age was between sixteen to

fifty was the object of this system. As a reward for this labour, they received the land of one *puree*, which is approximately equalled 3 acres. It is unclear to what extent this regulation was applied to the migrants. The *lallup* system also solved the problem of the labour shortage caused by scarcity of population.

The system of *lallup* became the coercive power of the Meitei kings to maintain and exploit the population of Manipur. Hence, the notion of "concentration of manpower" is undoubtedly appropriate in the case of early state formation of Manipur. In addition to that, the economic structure of Manipur was enhanced by acquiring cash revenue by extending its control over the hills and non-Meitei tribal areas in the valley. Manipur became a self-sustaining economy by extending agrarian settlement and collecting revenues from it.

With this brief enquiry into the existence of the feudal elements in the structure of the Meitei state in the pre-colonial period of the history of Manipur, it is however also clear that feudalism as the European form was non-existent in Manipur. However, the feudal elements and feudal nuances were found in the structure of the polity and the societal relationship in society in the pre-colonial Manipur as well. While the *lallup* functioned as the system for forming and consolidating the kingship, Hinduism provided and fortified ideological foundation for the Meitei kingdom.

It is clear that the immigration of Brahmins in Manipur had started during the previous centuries. Records are however lacking as to whether they were given special favours or whether they were given royal patronage during the reign of Charairongba. It shows that the influence of Hinduism was limited mainly to the Meitei court and not the larger society as yet. It was only during the reigns of Charairongba and his son Garibniwas that Hinduism was given royal patronage. It might not be a coincidence that this emphasis on Hinduism occurred when the kingdom and monarchy were threatened by both internal (intrigues to dethrone the monarch) and external (Burmese invasions) factors.

It is apparent that Hinduism had retained an insignificant status for several centuries and then suddenly received royal patronage. From the above pattern of incidents, the conclusion can be drawn that Hinduism became a vital force in the maintenance of the growth of the political order, mostly when the power of the ruler was at stake. It proves that construction of Hindu temples and religious ceremonies as state events were essential for strengthening the divine monarch and the sovereign. At

the outset, it is imperative to clarify the traditional faith system in order to understand this importance of Hinduism as a political tactic.

The traditional faith of the Meiteis was based on the beliefs on the various deities such as Pakhangba, Umanglai ('god of the forest'), and Sanamahi ('household deity') as well as the ancestors of each clan. In a situation where each tribe worshipped the gods of their respective clans, their identity was unrelated to the Meitei kings, and therefore the prestige of king became limited. This diffuse religious ideology and practice reflected the Meitei kings' lax control over their subjects. In this context, Hinduism provided the chance to consolidate the kingship. The process of Hinduization in Manipur valley started since the time the Brahmins from the neighbouring states such as Bengal and Assam settled into Manipur Valley.

It was under King Garibniwas alias Pamheiba that the conversion into Hinduism was imposed forcefully to the people. Hinduism was propagated in Manipur like any other state by producing texts and creating of local myths. The name Manipur itself was the creation of such process of positioning Manipur in the Hindu-world order. The Hinduization finally became successful enough to make the majority of Manipur population to identify themselves as descendants of Arjun (a prince in the Mahabharata).

Obviously, the Hinduization process of Manipur was far from smooth. This new religion faced an intense rejection from many groups of the population. As the Hinduism seized the position of the state religion, inevitably, clashes emerged between those brahmins who held the post of high priest and maibas who used to hold the position earlier. According to the records of the Royal chronicles of Manipur, there were cruel incidents regarding religious initiatives; Hindu temples were burnt down frequently as results of protests. In one incident, a Brahmin was killed.

Chingthangkomba realised the gravity of the situation regarding the conflicts. As a resolution to the intensifying situation, he re-established the old faith. Hinduism and the traditional faith could coexist peacefully from his reign. Chingthangkomba introduced Ras Leela in which the theme of the dance was Radha and Krishna while the form and style of the movement were traditional. Hinduism went through 'localisation' not only in the art of dance but also in various other fields to assimilate with the traditional idea and aesthetical sense of Manipur. For example, indigenous Meitei gods and goddesses were identified with that of the Hindu; Soraren as Indra, Nongpok Ningthauasas Shiva, Panthoibi as Durga or Parvati, and Wangbaren as

Varuna. In addition to that, the traditional Meitei festivals began to be recognised as Hindu festivals. Heigru Hitongba festival was renamed as Jal Yatra, Ahong Khongching as Rathra Jatra and many others. To be precise, Hinduism absorbed by Manipur was a Vaishnavism; Court ceremonialism and Hindu festivals like Holi, Rathajatra and Janmashtami are centred on Govindaji. Syncretization of Hindu rituals and ceremonies with the Meiteirituals helped Hinduism to become a substantial part of Meitei culture. These popular festivals still attract the massive attention of audiences in Manipur; not only Meiteis but also including other tribes and Muslims. Performing art such as Ras Leela and Kirtan became part of popular culture. This phenomenon could be seen as a result of the mass indoctrination of Hinduism amongst the Meiteis. All the Hindu festivals patronised by the kings were parts of powerful cultural projects for mass Hinduisation.

The introduction of Hinduism as a state religion brought many social and cultural changes in the Meitei society. The seven clans of the Meitei fold were all given Hindu gotras; Ningthauja as Shandilya, Angom as Kaushika, Chenglei as Bhardhwaja, Luwang as Kasyap, Khuman as Madhugalya, Moirang as Aitereya and Khaba-Nganba as Gautam. The king and all the Meiteis were declared as Kshatriyas. After the massive conversion, Meitei kingdom became a double caste society consisting of Brahmin and Kshatriya Meiteis. Now the status of the Brahmins in the society was pushed up in the social ladder to occupy the highest position in the social hierarchy. The position of the Brahmins in the society can be explained by the fact that the king Garibniwas performed a ritual purification as there was the incident that one Brahmin woman was killed. Although the Brahmins were not free from the duty of lallup, still they were free from other obligations as compared to the other section of the society. The lois and the keis, who had a fairly inferior social structure before Hinduism, were declared outcasts. Similarly, the hill tribes and the Muslims came to be recognized as unclean by the Meiteis. The adoption of Hinduism had led to the introduction of a concept like purity and pollution in Manipur.

After the First Anglo-Burmese War, Manipur faced many other changes. The Meitei kingdom created a standing army titled Manipur Levy. The Meitei king realised the importance of modern weapons namely, firearms. Firearms were constantly supplied by the British Government. Dissemination of new weapons brought drastic changes in war scenes. Patterns of traditional warfare transformed into that of modern wars. Rapid changes happened not only in the military field but also in

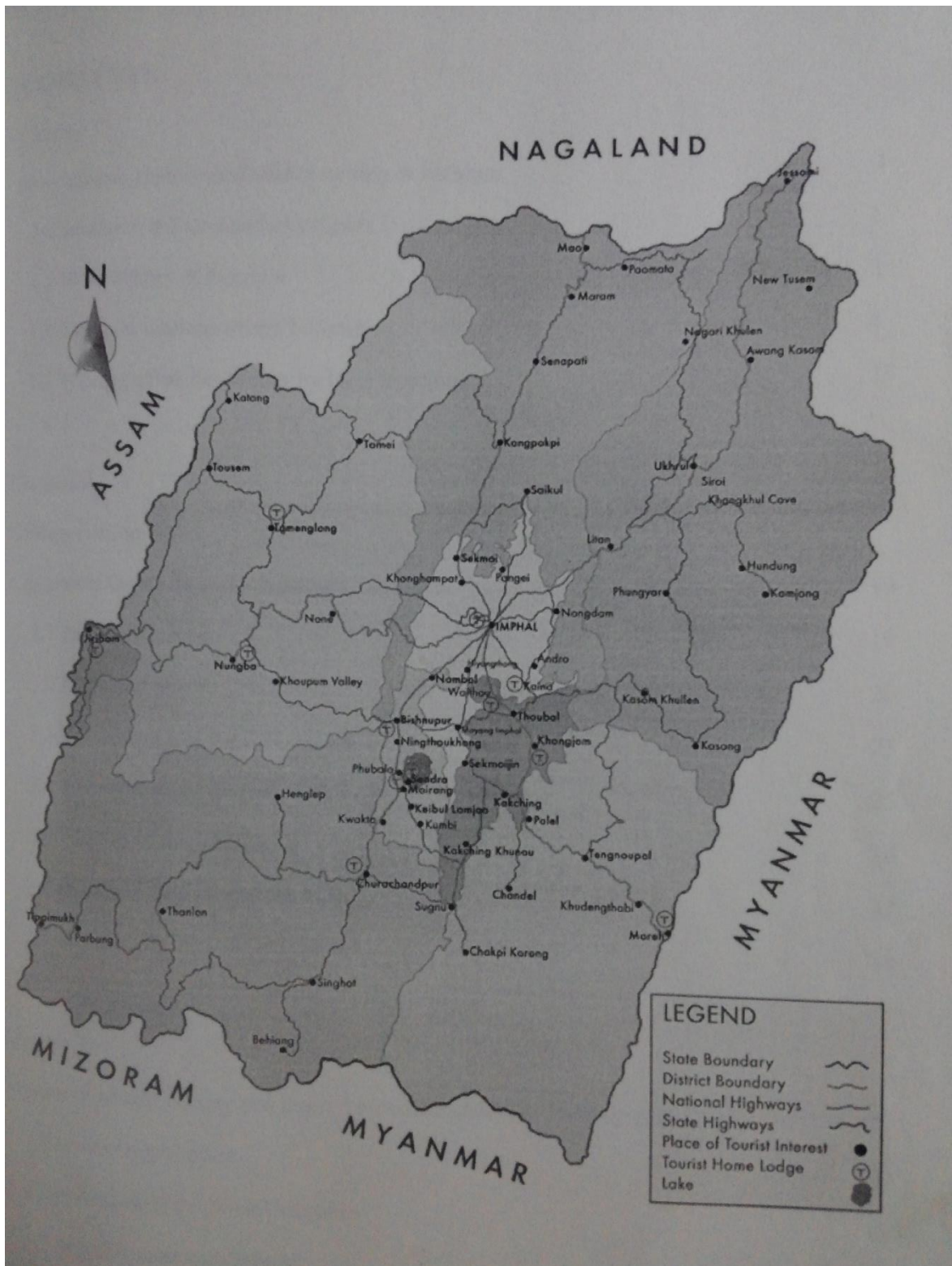
the political and economic system. As a result of military modernization, Manipur permanently consolidated the hill areas, which had been lost during the Burmese occupation of Manipur from 1819 to 1824. In addition to that, British invested on establishing the infra structure of Manipur such as bridges and roads for the purpose of facilitating the following functions; they needed a place which they could use as a fortress of British Northeast Frontier and long-term residence in neutral territory.

The year of 1825 was the turning point of this agro-economic tendency. Previous revenue system could suffice for king's expenditure on the usual governance of the state such as maintaining roads and bridges. When it came to the issue of the modern army, the outcome of the traditional agricultural economy was insufficient to manage the expenses.

The State led promotion of commercial activity began after 1825. The Meitei kingdom could secure finances for military matters in the way of imposing tax on exports and imports as cash. Tribute and revenue from surrounding hill areas also assisted the finance of the kingdom.

Unquestionably, support of British East India Company resulted in reinforcement of the authority of Meitei king. The British East India Company's intervention in Manipur was based on the geopolitical reasons. From the perspective of British East India Company, maximising the Meitei king's power was a necessary tactic to minimise the menace from Burma. That is to say, British East India Company used Manipur to gain definite control on the Northeast Frontier. Proceeding from this fact, one could logically assume that the intention of the Northeast Frontier management of British East India Company became an impetus for the maturity of the Meitei state.

The factors which served the early state formation in Manipur vary according to the eras and regions. Regardless of this non-uniformity, there was a common thread that ran throughout Manipur society. These included progressive changes such as the evolution of kingship, territorial expansion, an extension of large agrarian settlements and finally, extensive forms of controlling subjugated people, politically and economically.

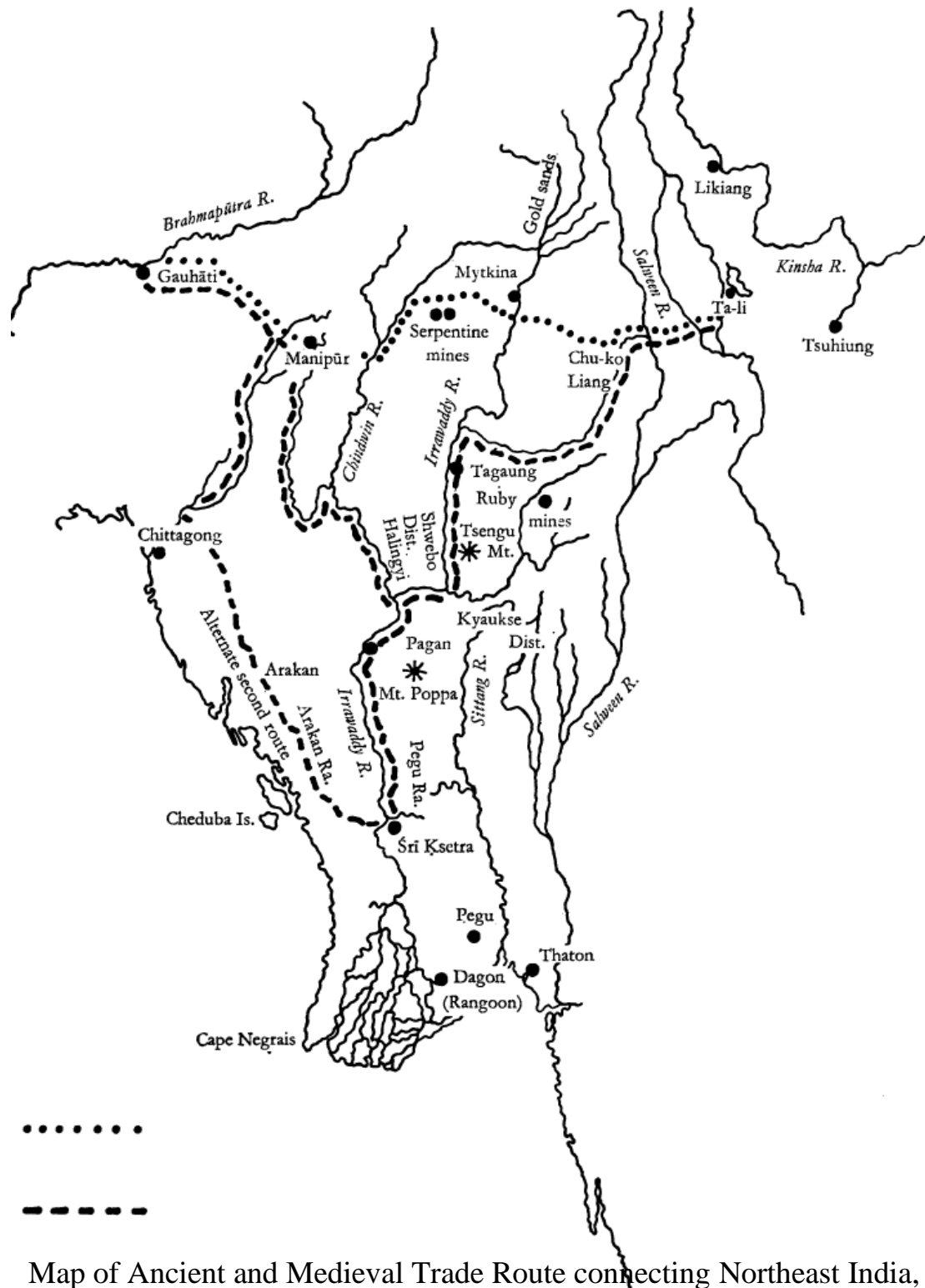


Source: Gangumei Kabui. History of Manipur Vol-1



Ghambir Singh's Emblem In Kohima

Sources: James Johnsntone, Manipur and The Naga Hills



Map of Ancient and Medieval Trade Route connecting Northeast India, Burma (Myanmar) and China Drawn

Source: Janice Stargardt, Burma's Economic and Diplomatic Relations with India and China from Early Medieval Sources, in *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 14, No. 1, April, 1971



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