



Women of MANIPUR

G.K. Ghosh
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Manipur belong to *Kirata Desa* according to ancient Indian scriptures. In some of the scriptures it was described as "*Subarna Bhū*" or the land of gold. As on today this state belongs to Hindunised Meithies and Bishnupriyas, semi-Hindunised Lois and Islamised Panggens who all live in the valley or foot hills covering bulk of the demography occupying minimum land and the tribals living on the high, hills having lower population occupying most of the land. The book deals with women of Manipur belonging to various groups and subgroups, their job and sorrow, impact of various races on them, their contribution to the society at large and action and plan to develop them from various angle, social, economic and political. The book, it is expected shall be useful for planners, social scientists, tourists and various scholars who have interest on Manipur and women development.

G.K. Ghosh a graduate in Chemical engineering served North Eastern India as Director, Khadi & Village Industries Commission for over four years when he had opportunity to study Manipur. A prolific writer who had already written 26 books on various topics such as environment, anthropology, women development, renewable energy and so on either alone or jointly. This is his fourth book on Women Development series. Over 30 of his articles on various subjects in English, Bengali and Oriya were published in various journals and periodicals of repute. He has so far presented over 20 papers in various annual sessions of Indian Science Congress in the section of Anthropology and Archeology.

Shukla Ghosh a graduate from University of Calcutta was in North Eastern India for over four years when she could study Manipur. A prolific singer who could also study various cultural aspects too. She has so far authored over ten books on various topics and presented four papers in section of Anthropology and Archeology in various annual sessions of Indian Science Congress.

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***“Manipura Sana-Leimayol,
Chingna Koyna Pansaba,
Haona Koyna Panngakpa!”***

*(My Manipura, Prime of the mainland of gold, How bulworked thou art
by the ranges of thine hills all around,
And sentinelled by the children of nature on their round!)*

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INTRODUCTION

Manipur remained as a feudal state during British raj though it was not independent. It was an independent country till British occupied it. After independence along with other feudal states it was also merged.

Aryavarta fell far too short in extent to enfold it. So did Bharatavarsha of later ages. Hence the Hindu puranas locate it within the kiratadesa. It was however, a "Suvarnabhu" or Land of Gold, and formed geographically, a part of "Suvarnabhu" of old so as to indicated by an old name of its, namely "Sanapung" which means "Land of Cold". Further, its own history together with foreign accounts, best evidences that this tract of land was a gold-producing country and that it had its own gold currency once.

The term Manipur however a Hindunised term which was introduced after 1734 AD when bulk of Meitheis embraced Vaisnav cult of Hinduism. To them however it was known as "Meithei Laipak" or the land of Meitheis or "Kangleipak" or royal land.

Manipur is a hill-girt tract of land. The girding hills not only delineate its march but wall it off from the adjoining regions into a distinct geographical entity. So is the feature, none of them ventured to deny it an independent territorial existence. It remained as inter-territorial state between the two regions now known as Myanmar and Assam.

It is, as it were, a labyrinth carved out of nature. The border hills not only make it hilled all round but shoot out off shoots inward. They form themselves into manifold ranges and run far into the interior till they cover eleven-twelfths of the whole extent of its surface and leave only a strip of land for a valley to be lengthwise from north to south. This valley which is the metropolis was quite safe and secure from foreign inroads as the approaches hereto were only through glens and defiles wherein non but glendoveers could pace firm and secure.

So, it had the opportunity to grow in power, make it felt far and wide and shine in full sovereign splendour from the earliest times until recently time wrought a change in its fortune and doomed it to lose its sovereignty in 1981, at the hands of British at the battle of Khomjam and form consequently a part of Indian India of the British regime.

This tract lies at a cross-road. Every down rush of races from the north towards Indo-China and India in early times used to leave in this soil a remnant each. So did every onrush of people from India and outside towards Indo-China and Indonesia. Every uprush of humanities from Indonesia towards India followed suit. So, the land became, at the dawn of history, may before its dawning, the homeland of several races whether akin or alien. In other words, batches of several peoples from different stocks of humanity loitered in their early movements to settle here in this soil. Some of them preferred the hills to the valley and lived isolated lives rearing, of course, with a jealous care, this respective tradition in its full primitive splendour and left the present tribals to represent them in the modern world. Of the rest, those who occupied the prime of the valley, had to enter into an age-long struggle against one another for self-preservation. Absorption of the weaker by the stronger went on in consequence for a long time. Only seven strongest powers, namely, the Ningthoujas, the Angoms, the Luwangs, the Khumans, the Moirangs, the Khaba-Nganbas and the Chengleis, who were already hybrids, survived only to interbreed themselves into ever the more a hybrid nationality into the so called Metheis, the three fold aspects of whose national life forms the main theme of the country's history. The Loi is not recognised as a pure Manipuri (or Methei). They appear to be descendants of the eighth group which was akin to Moirangs which formally occupied the Valley to the south. They were formerly independent but were reduced ages ago by the Metheis; hence the names Lois or subdued which was given to them after subjugation. They profess to be Hindus, but are not recognised as such by the orthodox. There was system of punishment in which a Manipuri could be degraded to be Loi by banishing him to a Loi village. It was also reported that Chinese prisoners of war during the rule of King Khagemba were also settled in Loi villages who taught the art of sericulture and silk. The Bishnupriyas are Indo-Aryan settled in Manipur mostly around Bishnupur since ages. The ancestors of the Muslim families of Manipur came at different times from Srihatta and

Cachar. They are known as Poggens. They took Manipuri wives and settled in Manipur adopting Meithei as their mother tongue.

The book deals about women of Manipur belonging to various communities. These women are born with unique talent of creativity and hardwork. In various chapters that follows, the book discusses about these women, their skill, social life, policy and so on to give a holistic picture. It may help us to draw action plan for Manipuri women and their background may also help us to draw action plan for women of various other states and countries.

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