

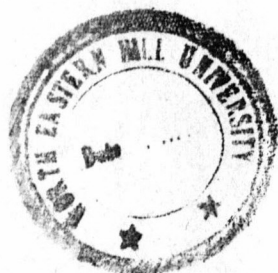
# MANIPUR

## PAST AND PRESENT

(The Heritage and Ordeals of a Civilization)

Volume—I  
History, Polity & Law

EDITED BY  
NAOREM SANAJAOBA



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FOREWORD BY  
Prof. C. von Fürer-Haimendorf

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TO  
MARTYRS

## Foreword

The north-eastern part of the Indian Subcontinent is a region where numerous different racial and ethnic groups merge and dovetail, distinct ideologies coexist side by side, often without influencing each other, and a multitude of mutually incomprehensible tongues are spoken. The geographical character of the area is equally uneven. The rugged highlands of Nagaland and Manipur have little in common with the level expanse of vast Brahmaputra valley, and on the region's northern border adjoining Tibet there are snowcrowned mountains whose alpine slopes offer pasture land for such animals as yak and Tibetan sheep of which there are no traces in the highlands of Manipur.

The diversity of the physical environment is matched by the heterogeneity of the racial pattern. For in North-east India peoples of Mongoloid stock occupy most of the highlands whereas members of the Indian branch of the Caucasoid race dwell in the villages and towns of the plains of Assam. The ideological diversity is equally kaleidoscopic, for adherents of Mahayana Buddhism occupy some of the peripheral hill-regions, while Hindu populations have long been established in the lowlands, where at one time they were subjected to martial Islamic incursions and later to the gradual infiltration of Bengali Muslims who now constitute a substantial part of the population of Assam.

The State of Manipur is in some respects a miniature replica of the larger picture of the entire north-eastern region, and the present volume compiled by a number of learned experts reflects the uneven character of the region as a whole.

As late as the beginning of the 20th century the Government of India seemed content to leave a political no-man's land, unmapped and largely unknown, on its northern border, but this applied only to the territory now established as the state of Arunachal Pradesh, while the areas adjoining Burma and inhabited mainly by Naga tribes closely related to the Nagas living in the hills of northern Burma, have been well explored and carefully surveyed during the last years of British rule.

It was not until the years of the Second World War when Japanese armies overran Burma and invaded the Naga Hills that the North-East Frontier assumed the role of a strategically important area, and the Government of India embarked on the exploration of the hill-regions between the plains of Assam and the Himalayan main-range.

Up to that time most of the ethnic groups of North-east India had been left to conduct their own affairs. Thus there was little interference with the way in which the various Naga tribes dealt with their internal affairs and the same applied to the tribal populations now included in Arunachal Pradesh.

A new situation which also affects Manipur has arisen when in recent years immigrant Nepalis colonized parts of Assam, some regions of Nagaland and also parts of Manipur. Chapter 16 of the present volume deals in great detail with the Nepali colonial expansion which has of late subverted the original ethnic character of the hills in many parts of North-eastern India. Indeed in Manipur the Nepalis are in the process of becoming the largest ethnic group after the Meiteis. The analysis of this Nepali infiltration is one of the most illuminating sections in the chapters describing the various phases in the demographic development of Manipur in Past and Present.

There are few books which provide as complete and meticulous a historical and economic account of any distinct part of India as this admirable volume on Manipur and the authors must be congratulated to their skill in compiling so comprehensive and lucid a description of a territory consisting of so large a number of different ethnic and cultural groups.

It is to be hoped that in the near future Manipur will be opened to scholars from countries outside India, and there can be no doubt that their understanding of the history and cultural structure of Manipur will be greatly improved if such visitors are able to use this volume as a guide for first hand observations during an extensive tour of the state. Such a tour would inevitably focus also on the rich archaeological material that has been found within the borders of Manipur. In the opinion of the joint authors some of this material points to the relationship of the ancient Meiteis with the Mon-Khmer and Tai peoples but there is no suggestion of a Mon-Khmer origin of either of the indigenous ethnic groups living in the region. There is also no attempt to link the origin of the Meiti people in any way with the historical civilization of classical China. On the contrary the authors draw attention to the fact that the study of the ancient history of the Manipur region cannot be claimed as comprehensive without taking into account a considerable degree of Hindu affiliation.

The complexity of the earlier history of Manipur is certainly great enough to require intensive consideration of historical and archaeological documents, and the great merit of this book is the listing and utilization

of a plethora of documents, statistics and learned books published at different dates. Of particular interest is the collection of political documents, government papers, correspondence between Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, telegrams, texts of treaties, extracts from legislation of the years when the various union territories and newly established states came into being. Such texts will enable historians and other scholars to understand and appreciate modern developments even without having to pay visits to North-east India.

LONDON,  
September 1987.

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf  
Professor Emeritus of Asian Anthropology  
in the University of London

## Acknowledgements

The editor of this volume expresses his sincere acknowledgement to the following reputed persons and institutions for the assistance and co-operation, extended towards the publication of the book by way of making documents, photographs and printed materials available for the project :

*Meetei Maichou* N. Khelchandra provided Documents No. VII, VIII, XI, XXI, XXII ; Dr. Sanabam Raghmani (Mangang) and Archivist Mrs. Ksh. Sorojini provided Documents No. IV, V and VI ; Dr. R.K. Pertii, Director, National Archives, New Delhi supplied Document No. XII.

The publishers of maps had been kind enough to permit the reprint of maps. Sri S. Ibohal Sarma, Proprietor, X Cine Studio, Imphal provided the rare photographs of Ancient Kangla, group photos, facsimile of the Manipur State Bank ; Sri R.K. Snahal (Bicomsana of Manipur) supplied Indira Gandhi's photograph. Sri T. Nilamani ; APO and Sri K. Tomba Sarma, Technician, Publicity Department of Government of Manipur, supplied the photographs of the Meetei Heroes.

General consultations were held on several occasions with Prof. J.N. Phukan, a specialist on South-East Asia, Gauhati University ; Prof. N.N. Acharyya, specialist on Ancient History, Gauhati University ; Dr. D.N. Mazumdar, specialist on Ethnic Anthropolgy, Gauhati University ; Dr. Salam Shyamkishore, Department of Philosophy, Gauhati University and a number of specialists whose names are not mentioned for want of space. Pre-publication xeroxing of materials were done by Sri Burman, Technician of G.U. Library with liberal permission of G.U. Librarian, Sri Talukdar.

### CREDIT LINE

The editor extends the credit line to the following individuals for their intimate association with this project from the initial stage to the production stage.

Sri N. Raghmani, Deputy Secretary, Manipur State Assembly ; Dr. Sanabam Raghmani, Mr. Khwairakpam Loken, former President of All Manipur Students Union and Manipur University Students Council, Imphal on many occasions extended their best support and help. Dr. Soyam Lokendrajit, and Mrs. N. (R.K.) Radhesana, also assisted me in different capacities in making the project and publication a reality.

The editor recalls the service of late Sri N. Jabotchandra (alias Ibochouba), who bravely faced premature and untimely death on Nov. 20, 1986, to technical side relating to the production of the manuscript of the book.

Acknowledgements are also due to the media and mass communications authorities in Manipur for their most timely publicity of the venture. Specifically, the names of Director, All India Radio Imphal, the editors of daily *Huyen Lanpao*, the daily *Prajatantra*, the daily *Toknga*, the daily *Chingtam*, the daily *Poknapham*, The daily *Khollao*, the daily *Simanto Patrika*, the *Manipur Mail* and the *Manipur News*, the *Khongthang* periodical, the *Lanmeithanbee* monthly and the *Nongpok Meira*, Silchar deserve mention.

The editor remains very much grateful to young Shri K.M. Mittal—who is one of the most imaginative Indian Publishers today for his encouragement towards taking up the venture and making the publication of the volume a commendable success. The last credit line is reserved for the unknown soldier, who carries forward the message of civilization to the ever-expanding edge of time and space.

—NAOREM SANAJAOBA

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### 1. Prof. Gangmumei Kabui

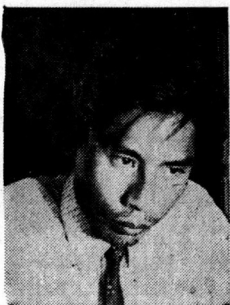
A distinguished historian of Manipur, he is a gold medalist in M.A. (History) from Gauhati University. He started teaching the M.A. classes attached to D.M. College, and then at J.N.U. Centre at Canchipur, Imphal. Currently he is a Fellow in the Manipur University. G. Kabui contributed articles on the Meeteis and Ethnoses, organised seminars in Manipuri history and took interest in social works. He has published a book, 'Anal—A Trans-Border Tribe of Manipur' (Published by Mittal Publications, Delhi). He is the Director, Institute of Civil Services Examinations, Manipur University.

### 2. Dr. N.N. Acharyya

An eminent historian, specialist, both in ancient history and Assamese history, Dr. Acharyya had his Ph.D. in history from London University and travelled widely in USA. He had been teaching in Gauhati University for nearly two decades and a half. A Reader in the department of history of Gauhati University, he had published a number of works on the history of Assam, and a couple of volumes on the North-Eastern region. At present, in the capacity of the president of the Oriental Indian Historical Conference, he takes keen interest in ancient history, particularly the Koch history.

### 3. Dr. Okram Kumar Singh

A pioneer-archaeologist of Manipur, Dr. O.K. Singh had his M.Sc. in Anthropology and Ph.D. from Gauhati University. After receiving training in Archaeology from Deccan College, Pune and joining a number of excavations, he worked independently since 1967 in Archaeology in Manipur and discovered a number of pre-historic caves. His original findings which number more than a dozen had been published. He was teaching in D.M. College, Imphal and is currently serving as Superintendent of Archaeology, Govt. of Manipur since 1978. His



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#### 4. Dr. Chongtham Budhi Singh

A Ph.D. in Anthropology from Gauhati University, he taught in the same university for a number of years and is currently teaching in the capacity of an Associate Professor in Manipur University. With a number of articles to his credit, Dr. Budhi Singh worked for his thesis on a Meetei Ethos and his current interest lies in History, Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology.

#### 5. Dr. R.K. Ranjit Singh



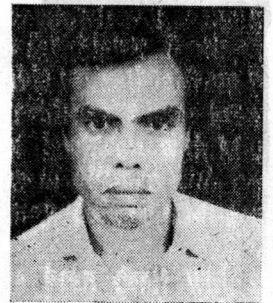
A Master's degree holder in Anthropology from Gauhati University, Dr. Ranjit obtained his Ph. D. in 1985, the subject of his Thesis being *'The Monsang Tribe of Manipur : A study in changing social orientation of a small group'* from Dibrugarh University and also obtained a Diploma in Fine Arts. He has been teaching in D.M. College as a Lecturer in Anthropology since 1972. His current interest is the study of the Ethnoses in Manipur.

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**8. M.K. Priyabrata Singh**

Maharajkumar P.B. Singh, a former army Captain and the younger brother of Late Maharajah Bodhachandra Singh, the last ruler of Manipur, was the first Manipuri Chief Minister under the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947. A bachelor, a painter and a distinguished versatile social worker, P.B. Singh keeps his eye on the integration of all the Ethnoses in Manipur and promotion of their harmonious relationship. On many occasions, he proposed the launching of developmental projects in the State of Manipur. At present, he is the President of the Manipur Cultural Integration Conference.

**9. Dr. Konsam Manikchand Singh**

Dr. Manikchand is a Senior Lecturer in Government G.P. Women's College, Imphal for a number of years. For his work on the ancient Meetei Confederation, he was awarded the degree of Ph. D. in the discipline of Social Philosophy by the Gauhati University. His specific interest is the study of prehistory and social philosophy.

**10. Dr. (Mrs.) Ksh. Bimola Devi**

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**11. Sri Rajkumar Snahal Singh**



Popularly known as Bicomsana for his becoming the first B.Com. from Calcutta University among the Manipuris, Rajkumar Snahal retired from Manipur Civil Service in 1977. With more than 65 works to his credit including 'Manipur Itihas', 'Bir Tikendra-jit Singh', 'Thangal General' etc. and a number of edited Meeteilol works, he was President of Manipur Cultural Forum, Manipur Sahitya Parishad and a member of EC of the Manipur State Kala Akademi. In recognition of his rich contributions to Manipuri language and culture, he was honoured as 'Gavesnabhusan' in 1986 by the Manipur Sahitya Parishad, Imphal.

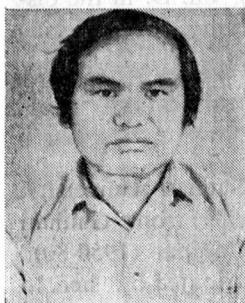
### 12. Dr. H. Nabakishore

Dr. Nabakishore is a Ph. D. in Economics and also a holder of a degree in law. Having authored 12 text books of college level and 20 research articles, he is Senior Fellow and Head of Department of Economics in Manipur University. He is a member of 10 specialized bodies where his expertise is utilized by the State. He takes keen interest in Banking and Industrial Economics particularly in the context of Rural Development.



### 13. Dr. K. Romonikumar

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### 14. Dr. J.P. Dixit and Dr. R.P. Singh

Dr. Dixit and Dr. Singh are teaching in Manipur University, Canchipur, Imphal where the department of Earth Sciences takes keen interest in the geological survey of the state.

### 15. Dr. Soyam Lokendrajit Singh

A student leader in his college days, Soyam Mathangkhanba *alias* Lokendrajit has a number of write-ups to his credit in the field of Meetei-logy and social philosophy. A Ph.D. in Philosophy from the Shantiniketan University, Dr. Lokendrajit is a lecturer in D.M. College and is also a think-tank for the Meeteis. A scholar with a progressive outlook, he had published his book, "Problem of Freedom and Necessity of Human Action" (by Mittal Publications, Delhi).

### 16. Mr. M. Ibohal

After obtaining his LL.B. Degree from Gauhati University in 1980,

Mr. Ibohal joined the Manipur Judicial Service. His published books are : 'A Study in Local Self-Government in Manipur' and 'A Constitutional and Legal History of Manipur'.

**17. Sri Khullem Chandrasekhar Singh**

An active exponent of Meeteiloy, he compiled 'Loiyymba Shinyen' the first written Constitution of Manipur, which remained in archaic Meeteilol for several centuries. He had published 11 works and monographs on Meeteilol and is planning and preparing to publish 10 more works. Sri Chandrasekhar Singh had been honoured by a number of forums as 'Pandit', 'Fellow', 'Sahitya Shiromoni' and 'Jyotish Ratanakor' among others.

**18. Mr. Nongmaithem Ibohal**



An M.A. from the J.N.U. centre, Imphal and with a degree in Law in 1983 from Manipur University, Mr. Ibohal contributes articles on law and politics. He is a member of the Legal Aid Service Clinic, L.M.S. Law College, Imphal. His research interest lies with the study of ancient state system and the administration of Justice.

**19. Dr. Sanabam Raghmani**

An LL.M. degree holder from Kurukshetra University, with a Ph.D. in Law from the same university, Dr. Raghmani had been teaching in 3 law colleges in Manipur till he joined as a lecturer in the Diploma Course in Labour Law in Manipur University in 1985. With 4 monographs in Meeteilol on Nature cure etc., he worked for his Ph. D. in 'Meetei Personal Law'. At present, he edits a journal and takes keen interest among others, in Philosophy and Customary Laws.



## Introduction

### FROM THE CRADLE OF PITHECANTHROPUS

Human history had recorded the birth, rise and decay of civilizations—gigantic or modest. When a civilization left the theatre, it does not vanish in thin air without leaving its imprint and trail behind. Equidistant spatially from the fertile Crescent and the Indus Valley civilization on the one hand and the Funan and the Hoang Ho civilizations on the other, the little and modest Manipuri civilization existed before and after the Christian era; to be more specific, it existed in between Kamarupa, present day Assam and Burma. The early state of Manipur had, in its recorded history, two millennia old political organisation, a stable cultural network supported by a well developed literary language and several hundreds of scriptures, gold and silver currency which provides a living testimony to its economic organization inside and trade and commerce with the South East Asian countries outside. Like any other annals of old civilization, its history knew successful military campaigns against the neighbouring countries and defeat in more or less equal measure. A constitutional monarchy governed by a constitution in the past, the early state of Manipur which was not annexed to the British empire by Queen Victoria even when her military defeat in Anglo-Manipuri war in 1891 warranted annexation, was governed by Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 till its eventual merger with the newly born Republic of India on October 15, 1949.

Manipur was known by various names to different countries and states in the past such as 'Poirei Meetei Leipak', or 'Poileipak', or 'Kangleipak' to themselves. 'Kathes' or 'Ponnas' to the Burmese, 'Hsiao Po-lo-mein' to the Chinese, 'Cassay' to the Shans (Tais), 'Moglai' to the Cacharis and Bengalees and 'Mekele' to the Assamese. R. Brown pointed out a century before that Manipur was known as 'Maithi Laipak' (Maithi=Meethei and Laipak=country) to the Manipuris themselves (*Statistical Account of the Native State of Manipur and the Hill Territory under its Rule, 1873*). Prof. N.N. Acharyya, a noted Orientalist of Gauhati University observes that Manipur was known to the Arabic, Persian,

Greek, Roman, Chinese, Burmese, Shan and other historians, as international trade route of the past passed through the country. By referring to Tugma, Triglypton, Mareura and Kirrhadia, G.E. Gerini cites Ptolemy's probable knowledge of Manipur (*Gerini, Ptolemy's Geography of Eastern Asia, 1909*). Since 33 A.D. till the rule of last Maharaja Bodhachandra, Manipur was ruled by seventy-four kings, of whom the hallowed names of Pakhangba, Naothingkhong, Loyyumba, Kiyamba, Khagemba, Chhairongba, Pamheiba, Jai Singh, Gambhir Singh, Nara Singh, Chandrakirti and Chura Chand Singh are outstanding.

Seven major principalities constituted the early kingdom of Manipur and the kingdom was administered by the monarch with the active participation and advice of sixty-four noblemen. The primeval fire, believed to be the original fire, produced by the Meeteis is still burning at Andro; it is known and worshipped as 'Androgi Mei' (the fire of Andro). Manipur is an embodiment of the highland culture developed by the ethnoses living at the hills and the Meetei culture at the valley. A notable feature of the Manipuri life is that caste discrimination was unknown to the universal Manipuri mind and the women never experienced the gender discrimination or inferior status, unlike many social systems which thrive on enslavement of one section of the society by another. Manipuri history is proud of its rich legend, mythology, epics and cultural achievements through the ages. This volume and subsequent volumes will attempt to reveal the wonder that Manipur was and explode the many myths behind its story.

In the recent past, a couple of Manipuri scholars of the Sanskritization persuasion identified her with the Manipura of the Mahabharata; they based their arguments on the similarity of name of the land with that of the Hindu epic. Indological accounts, written by non-Meetei scholars from outside do not support this contention and locate the Manipura of the Mahabharata somewhere else. There is hardly any reliable Indological account which take kindly to the claims of the couple of Meetei historians and the claim is kept to themselves exclusively. A typical quote from the innumerable Indological accounts of similar persuasion is cited here for the sake of clarity. S. Bhattacharya writes: '—the Manipura mentioned in the Mahabharata was situated near Kalinga and its identification with the modern Manipur is not justifiable' (*A Dictionary of Indian History, University of Calcutta, 1967*). Following his logic, it is a well known fact that even today Sanskritization is done by renaming N.E.F.A. as Arunachal Pradesh, Khasi and Jaintia as Meghalaya although Dravidization is also done by way of re-naming Madras as Tamilnadu and Mysore as Karnataka; Mongolianization, however, has never been heard of even in the case of Manipur, which is a state with predominant Mongolian population with the primeval strain of Austric population and later traces of Aryan race.

Erudite Meetei scholars or *Maichous* who have thorough knowledge of the ancient and medieval Meetei scriptures and recorded history (Meeteis have a peculiar heritage of recording not only the royal chronicles but also the family chronicles since time immemorial; they stand out, for this reason only, as the rare literate civilization which is compatible with the Chinese practices) vehemently endorse the view that the Sanskritized name 'Manipur' replaced the ancient Meetei nomenclature of the land under the pressure of one Santidas, a pyromaniac from Bengal, who for reasons of greed and jealousy burnt the Meetei *puyas*, conspired with the monarch to expell the Meetei scholars and replaced the casteless universal Meetei religion '*Sanamahi*' with Vaishnavism of Bengal school in the 18th century. His activity left a permanent scar in the Manipuri mind and also kept a permanent wedge between the emotional psyche of the highlanders on the hills and the Meeteis in the valley. The 'Rasputin' died with bitter remorse for his evil acts, but proselytisation of the Meeteis became a hard fact although every Meetei family never discontinued the worship of their ancestral god '*Sanamahi*' in every corner of the Meetei household till today. The values of caste or class discriminations are very much foreign to Meetei mind.

Till date historians had not given a serious thought to the history of Manipur. Nari Rustomji in his '*Imperilled Frontiers*' completely ignored its existence and V.P. Menon in his '*Integration of Indian States*' wrote that the history of Manipur was obscure. The 'obscurity' concept had very much obsessed the mind of the historians; and the indifferent attitude shown to the history of a civilization has virtually lost its relevance, particularly in the space-age. On the contrary, Europeans who visited the country in the last few centuries had not left without words of appreciation of the beautiful land and the civilization that existed. 'Switzerland of the East' to Lord Irwin, 'A pretty place more beautiful than many of the show places in the World' to Ethel S.C. Grimwood, 'A flower on the lofty heights' to the Japanese, Manipuri civilization had through the ages acquired its unique and distinct character, although visible monuments or megastructures which symbolise the torture of the masses under the caprices of despots are found missing in the historical landscape of Manipur.

Manipuris are proud of the fact that despots who dip their hands in the blood of the masses were never conceived in the womb of the Meetei civilization. The values that Manipuri civilization evolved during the last two millennia very closely conform to the principles of Universal Human Rights, advanced by the Human Rights Instruments of today in the field of non-discrimination against women, anti-racism, anti-casteism and above all, anti-class socio-economic paradigm. The aberrations, brought about during the eighteenth century had succeeded little in obstructing the cultural flow which neatly fits into contemporary human rights. Civilization is what a civilization should be, leave alone the

magnitude and expanse ; the essence and the value matter more than anything else which are subject to the natural law of erosion, decay and ultimate disintegration.

That Manipur had a civilization is not a figment of imagination. C.J. Lyall wrote : "It was my fortune to visit Manipur only once (in February, 1888) during my service in Assam, and I am thus acquainted with the subject chiefly by hearsay. But I have always taken a lively interest in *this singular oasis of comparative civilization* and organized society, set in the midst of a congeries of barbarous people, over whom its rulers exercise an authority which, if scarcely approaching the settled policy of more advanced communities, is at least in the direction of peace and order" (His *Introduction to the Meitheis* by T.C. Hodson, 1908 ; emphasis added).

Manipur is inhabited in the plains by the Meeteis predominantly, including Meetei Mussalmans (*Pangals*), Meetei Brahmins (*Bamons*), Meetei Christians and the indigenous ethnoses and in the surrounding hills by not less than twenty-nine ethnoses—the Nagas, the Kukis, the Lushais, the Chins, their sub-ethnoses, which at certain points in history were closely related to the Meeteis. In the recent past, Indians of all cultural persuasions, Nepalis, Bangladeshis and illegal immigrants have settled in the valley ; the illegal immigration had threatened the continuance of the identity of the Manipuris. The general public is obsessed with the fear of swamping of the Manipuris by the foreign nationals from across the national borders. The current history of Manipur is very much under stress and strain, particularly after 1949, since the possibility of swamping the indigenous populace by foreign nationals who come like sea waves is no longer remote and the neighbouring state of Tripura had already visibly shown how the indigenous populace could be swamped within a couple of decades and rendered historically or politically insignificant for all times to come.

Considering the cultural heritage of the early past and the living tradition in folk and oral history, Manipuri civilization stands out as the embodiment of the cultural achievements of both the highlanders and the Meeteis in the valley, who having suffered together the birth pangs of the past and many an ordeals of survival, are sharing a common destiny against heavy odds. The composite character of the Manipuri culture is an expression of the common sensibility. Whatever diversities are perceptible had been contained by the common experience through the ages. E.H. Carr observes : 'The old conception of national character based on biological differences has long been exploded, but differences of national character arising out of different national backgrounds of society and education are difficult to deny' (*What is History ?*).

Why the civilization of Manipur had always been kept out of the perception of the historians is the million dollar question. With the exception of a very few honourable cosmopolitan historians, a typical

historian tends to write the history of his ancestors and their achievements. Very few historians could pull themselves up while holding their shoe strings by two hands. There is hardly any sense for a Jew to write the glory of the Germans or for a Neo-Nazi elite to extol the Semitism. In the glorification of crypto-racism of one kind or another, history remained a helpless damsel in distress and Manipuri history is not an exception. Hugh Tinker comments, 'Most histories are content to deal with the Indian heartland, and to treat the near neighbours only as factors in India's border relations' (*South Asia : A short history*, 1966). Tinker's observation is very much appropriate in the Manipur case. Sunitikumar Chatterjee also felt that more than fair justice had been done in the historiography of the non-Mongolian bases of Indian historiography ; he comments, 'But there has never been *an attempt* at a general appraisalment of the Mongoloid or Sino-Tibetan elements in Indian culture' (Kirata-Jana-Krti *The Indo-Mongoloids : Their Contribution to the History and Culture of India*, 1974).

We have very good reasons to believe that a Republican history should be intrinsically and qualitatively different from the colonial history, which is either class-oriented or ethno centric to the core ; what is more significant than the tools and skill of a historiographer or historian is the attitude that is the mental framework of a flower girl who plucks only the flowers of her choice just to fit into her basket thereby leaving out the entire garden, not to speak of the petals. A history of Manipur without incorporating the cultural achievements of the age-old highlanders will be as incomplete as Hugh Tinker's observation noted above. Subsequent volume will dwell on the achievements of the highlanders through the ages. The eminent contributors to this volume may be said to have succeeded to a considerable extent in illuminating the dark corners of a least known South East Asian civilization—that is the other profile.

Recent archaeological evidence of the palaeolithic culture that thrived in Manipur indicates that even before the migrants from South-East Asia in the past settled, the Manipuri autochthones evolved the stone age and other cultures. Among the Meeteis, there is a belief and folk tradition as well that they had their original home at 'Koubru hill' and 'Langmaiching' hill from within Manipur. Manipuri autochthones of the palaeolithic culture would have been either Austric or Mongoloids or even a hybrid of both, since by all accepted accounts, Austrics were the original settlers of India and the early Peking man or Java man—the Mongoloids—settled in South East Asia, of which Manipur is a part. Aryan invasion and destruction of the city civilization at the Indus was in the later period and their influence to Manipur should not have been earlier than their painstaking dispersion to the east from the Ganges doab. Even for getting an opening in the Gangetic belt, they had to fight for five hundred years with the autochthones in Punjab.

Aryan migration to Manipur even in trickles was in the late historic times, when the political organization and the cultural cohesiveness were already achieved by the Austriacs and the Mongolians. The *Meetei puyas* relating to the migration of the Brahmins narrate in details the exact number of Brahmins who came and settled in Manipur since the 15th century A.D. The Puyas also mention how they came without female members, how they were allowed to settle with Meetei wives and how they were given family names by the Meetei kings. Similar is the case with the *Meetei pangals* who were settled after their defeat in war. The migrants were Meeteised. The physical characteristics of the early settlers in the North Eastern region, as described by the Indological and the foreign accounts indicate that the autochthones were Mongoloids and Austriacs.

The people of Kamarupa, as reported by Hiuen Tsang, were of small stature and had dark yellow complexion. The description also closely fits into the Sino-Tibetans and the Manipuris. The ethnic affinity of Manipuris with the South East Asians is strong. Hugh Tinker writes, 'It may be that the Veddoid immigrants were preceded by Mongoloid tribes, the precursors of the Tibeto-Burman people—Evidence of the Mongoloid strain is visible in many of the peoples of the North-East India. As a dominant race, the Mongoloid did not penetrate beyond Burma, Assam, and the Himalayan hill states, of which Tibet and Nepal are the most important'.

As regards the pre-Dravidian populace in the region, Anthropologist Haddon remarks, 'It may be tentatively suggested that there is an ancient dolichocephalic platyrrhine type (pre-Dravidian), which is strong among the Khasi, Manipuri, Miki, Kachari etc. ; but is weaker among the Naga tribes'. Gordon T. Bowles observed the existence of a Mon-Khmer continuum in the Assam region—the present North East (The People of Asia, 1977). Ptolemy's Kirrhadia which is the counterpart of the Kiratas or Cinas of the Hindu epics should have supported the autochthones in Manipur and Assam (Cf. Bimala Churn Law, Geographical Essays relating to Ancient Geography of India, 1976). The cultural development of the region had been adversely commented upon by the Aryan accounts and it was possible that the Aryan accounts like any other ethnocentric accounts undermine any foreign culture or even ignored those aspects which deserve mutual appreciation.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji commented that the pre-Aryan civilizations in the Indian sub-continent were in many respects higher than the Aryan culture and the Aryans, by way of Aryanisation in language and Sanskritization in culture, colonised the higher civilization ; he notes that the philosophy of Karma, transmigration of soul, yoga, ideas behind Siva and Devi Puja, Puranic and epic myth, material culture, culture of rice, coconut, tamarind, betel leaf, folk and nautical crafts, use of vermilion—turmeric, the Sindh-Punjab script that preceded the Brahmi were all pre-Aryan and non-Aryan cultures (Indo-Aryan and Hindi, 1960). Assimilation

in its perverse form is a process by which all the best are owned by the dominant race and all the worse are attributed to the assimilated races.

Manipuri autochthones of the early period should have expanded their cultural base after the intimate mingling of their culture with those of the migrants from the other parts of South East Asia and in the mingling process, the Aryan culture, acquired by the South East Asians through other routes might have been partly transferred to the Manipuris also at a very late stage. A.L. Basham records, 'The Mongolians of various races have been entering India over the Himalayan and north-eastern passes since long before history' (Basham, ed., *A Cultural History of India*, 1975). Which Mongolian strain had widened the cultural base of the autochthones in Manipur is a relevant question that gives rise to a number of alternative hypotheses. To simplify the issues, it could be safely presumed that almost all the strains at certain points of historic times had Sinic origin, despite the cultural variations and evolution of the early states in different epochs. Even the non-Chinese Tais or Shans, the Burmese are not dissociated from Sinic origin.

R. Boileau Pemberton traced the origin of the Meeteis to the great Tatars: 'Rejecting, as totally unworthy of attention, the Hindoo origin claimed by the Muneepoorees of the present day, we may safely conclude them to be descendants of a Tatar colony, which probably emigrated from the north-west borders of China during the sanguinary conflicts of supremacy, which took place between the different members of the Chinese and Tatar dynasties, in the 13th and 14th centuries; at which time, there was an extensive kingdom called Pong, occupying the country between the frontiers of Yunan, and the hills separating the Kubo valley from Muneepoor (Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India, 1835). Eminent Manipuri historians Professor Gangmumei Kabui and Pandit Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra endorse the view that the Pongs (Shans with their capital at Mogaung) entered Manipur in 698 A.D. (Cf. Cheitharol Kumbaba, the Manipuri Royal Chronicle). Pandit N. Khelchandra suspects that 'Khunlai', the younger brother of Khunlung, the first Pong king might have been a Meetei. It is widely accepted that Shamlung, the younger brother of king Sukanpha settled in *Meeteileipak* for ten years; the evidence of Shamlung's arrival are indicated by names of places, fruits which bear the name of 'Pong' even today.

A reputed Meetei archaeologist, Okram Kumar Singh, comments on the migration of the South East Asians: '—it seems highly probable that a group of people from the regions of South China equipped with fully ground and polished stone tools and corded tripod wares entered into Manipur following the courses of Irrawady river and its tributaries' (*Archaeology in Manipur, Series-I, Napachik: A Stone Age Site in the Manipur Valley*, 1983).

Sunitikumar Chatterjee also noted that from 2,000 B.C. onwards, Sino-Tibetan speakers from China pushed South and West and infiltrated

into India. A Meetei school floats a proposition that a particular Meetei era had been evolved one and half millennia before the Christian era. A Meetei historian W. Ibohal Singh observes 'Reference is made that counting of age by era system started by Mariya Phambalcha (Maliya Fambalcha) from 1396 B.C.' (On fixing date of Cheiraoba, 1980). Although, the Meetei era, '*Mariya Phambalcha*' has not yet been accorded public or official recognition, it points towards the remote antiquity of the Manipuri civilization.

The Thai school of Meetei origin is increasingly drawing adequate attention, although the early Meetei Kingdom was several centuries older than Siam or the present day Thailand, founded in the 13th century by Rama Khamheng. It was possible that the Thai population movement which started in the pre-Christian era had reached Manipur before the Thai branches scattered in many places like Laos, Cambodia, Central Burma or other parts of the South East Asia. The trade route also operated between the West and China via Manipur. John F. Cady points out, 'A well-defined overland trade route to India via the Mekong, Salween and Irrawady river gorges was opened in 120 A.D.' (South East Asia : Its historical development, 1964). Centuries before the destruction of Nan Chao in 1253 A.D. by Mongols and subsequently after the destruction, the Thais moved and migrated towards the south following Irrawady, Chindwin and then to Assam (See D.J.M. Tate, the Making of Modern South East Asia, Vol. I, 1977). John Cady writes that following the destruction of Nan Chao, the Thais moved towards south in 700 A.D. and the Pyu capital, Halingyi fell to the Nan Chao Shans in 850 A.D. Nan Chao, the original homeland of the Thais (Shans) in China started disintegration following the Christian era. It was possible that the first wave or subsequent Nan Chao waves could have joined the trade route so as to eventually reach the Manipuri land. This wave could have even constituted one of the seven principalities or merged with the Manipuri autochthones thereby creating a new primitive ethnos.

The Thai proposition is strengthened by the evidence of the population movement of the Mon and Thai peoples to the South-Western side of Burma which merge with the present Shan belt of Burma (E.H.G. Dobby, South East Asia, pp. 191-95). By strange coincidence, some of the places or rivers in Southern Indo-China bear names very similar to the Meetei names ; further investigations may reveal the etymological riddle. Dobby refers to '*Myittha*' route. Etymologically, '*Myittha*' and even '*Mon-Thai*' are very close to the word 'Meetei', which is pronounced very often by the foreigners as '*Meethai*' or '*Maithai*'. Charles A. Fisher refers to '*Myittha*' river in this note : 'One important new mining development remains to be mentioned, namely that of the Sub-bituminous coal deposits at Kalewa, near the confluence of the Chindwin and *Myittha* rivers, some 500 miles from Rangoon'. The names like '*Luwang*', '*Kha*' which is the Laotian

equivalent of one million *Mois* in Indo-China, 'Mon', 'Thai' and 'Myittha' bear close resemblance to the names of early principalities of Manipur.

Charles Fisher writes that the dolichocephalic Nesiots and brachycephalic Pareoeans (Mons called Peguans or Talaings and Khmers are early Pareoeans) resembling the South Chinese came to South East Asia overland from North via the Assam and Burma borderland. He observes, 'Nesiot characteristics are very much marked among many of the hill peoples of the mainland, such as the Wa and Palaung of Burma, the Kha and Moi further east in Indochina and Jakun of the Malaya peninsular'. '*Muang Thai*' is the vernacular name for Thailand.

Another school of the Meetei ethnogenesis insinuates a probable alliance between the Burmese or the Thai component. Sir Thomas Holdich describes, 'Most authorities agree that the Burmese are closely allied to the Shingphos on the north, and the Manipuris and kindred tribes on the west' (India Political, Cultural, Geographical and Historical, 1975). The possibility of an early alliance is not ruled out; but in the medieval history, the Pongs and the Meeteis were comrade-in-arms against the Burmans, who later on turned out to be the sworn enemy of the Meeteis and plundered, destroyed and devastated the Meetei civilization. Such devastations and plunders of Manipur completely exhausted the wealth of Manipur and enriched Burma or for that matter even the Koch kingdom. The vicious circle was complete only when the wealth, plundered from Manipur was again syphoned off to Her Majesty's coffers. History has made the wealthy paupers, rendered the nomad barbarians, the *Herrenvolk* over the head and shoulder of superior civilizations and poor traders as one time masters of the world. The odyssey has no destination and remains eternal.

Cultural congruence and parallelism between and among the South East Asians are remarkable, despite variations in language and certain aspects, which are due to the influence of non-South East Asian cultures on the one hand and the independent evolution of local cultures in the tunnel of history. A close study could reveal the cultural affinity of the Manipuris—starting from household life and individual temperament to community way of life and national ethos—with the descendants of the Hoang Ho and Funan civilizations.

Following the mummification of the Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian civilizations in the fertile crescent, the Oriental civilizations gradually emerged at the horizon of the Indus valley, the Hoang Ho and the Funan in South East Asia. The participation of the Mongolians, the Austriacs and the Dravidians in the three latter civilizations had clearly indicated that centuries before the Aryans settled the dust from the wheels of their chariots, the goddess of civilization had already taken the South East Asians in her lap. The Aryans would have simply altered the trademark and revalorised the superior civilizations by Aryanising the language and skilfully taking over the reins and monopolising the hold irrevocably.

Sunitikumar Chatterji was one of the first in modern period to have pointed out the above facts of history (Cf. details in Kirata-Jana-Krti, 1974). It has not been suggested without reasons that Indian history should be rewritten. The present cast of the flooded heaps of history books had been found to be manifestly and explicitly injudicious to the Mongoloids and one can, without much difficulty, catch hold of the omnipresent culprit of ethnocentrism in between the lines. One of the victims of such approaches happens to be the Manipuri civilization.

Historian T. Burrow records, 'The Indus population, particularly of the cities, was a cosmopolitan one. It included Mediterraneans, Proto-Australoids, Alpines and Mongoloids' (Basham, ed., A Cultural History of India). E. Mackay holds similar view (The Indus Civilization, 1935). Burrow makes an assessment of the Indus civilization, 'It is clear from the material remains that the Indus civilization was in certain respects superior to that of Aryans. In particular it was a city civilization of a highly developed type, while by contrast city life was unfamiliar to the Aryans'. The Mongoloidal Funan Civilization that existed in the first Christian era near Bangkok was one of high order. Every civilization—big or small, magnificent or modest—is an asset of the total reservoir of human achievements through specialization and performance ; and every rational individual has good reasons to be the proud heir to the total civilization of mankind. Manipuri civilization happened to be one of the modest participants in the entire exercise of the species in a slice of the space-time-culture-continuum—the ongoing human march to the eternity.

A literate civilization for several centuries, Manipur had several hundreds of ancient and medieval Meetei scriptures and literatures which dwell upon the theory of creation, astronomy, geography, history, arts, culture among a host of others. Sunitikumar Chatterjee unfolds, 'The beginnings of this old Manipuri literature (as in the case of Newari) may go back to 1500 years, or even 2,000 years, from now.' *Cheitha-rol Kumbaba, Ningthourol Lambuba, Numit Kappa, Leithak Leikharon, Chainarol, Panthoibi Khongkul, Nungban Pombi Luwaoba, Loyumba Shinyen. Sanamahi Laikal, Mashin, Chada Laihui, Chakpa Khunda Khunthok, Naathingkhong Phambal Kaba, Khuman Kangleirol, Moirang Ningthourol, Bamon Khunthoklon, Poireiton Khunthokpa, Pakhangba Nongkarol, Laishemlon, and Sakok Lamlel* among others are some of the outstanding Meetei early scriptures which record the story of human evolution, the myths, legends, pre and protohistory and the history of seventy-four kings who ruled in the country since 33 A.D. till Manipur's merger with the Union of India in 1949.

The Meetei confederacy emerged out of seven more or less independent principalities, ruled by independent kings. The principalities of *Angom, Moirang, Khaba—Nganba* and *Chenglei* existed before the Christian era and subsequently after, the principalities of *Khuman, Luwang, Ningthouja* came into existence. The Manipuri highlanders also have seven

clans like the Meeteis. The Meetei confederacy later on evolved into a country of both the highlander-ethnoses and the Meeteis, which was the end product of the seven early principalities. The territory of Manipur was much bigger in the past despite periodic fluctuations. R. Boileau Pemberton recorded, 'the territories of Muneepur have fluctuated at various times with the fortunes of their princes, frequently extending for three or four day's journey east beyond the Ningthee or Khyendwen (Chindwin) river, and west to the plains of Cachar'.

### PAGEANT OF THE LITTLE ODYSSEY

The annals of Manipur had been made colourful and lively by the occasional infighting among the seven early principalities and frequent lightning campaigns from their brother highlanders. Stability and order were restored with the emergence of the Meetei confederacy, which later on evolved the institutionalised early state, the constitutional edict, division of *pannas*, administration under legal norms, installation of 'Shingloop' (a village level economic organisation), 'Lalloop' (a military institution equivalent to conscription of one able man from every household), and administration of the country on the advice of sixty-four *Phamdous* (equivalent to cabinet) including ministers like *Awapurel* (Minister for foreign affairs, specially to conduct relations with the Burmese) and above all, a standing army. The little civilization had possessed all the basic components of a nation state.

The Manipuri pageant was replete with military victories over more powerful and bigger countries on the one hand and defeat or even devastation on the other, at the hands of the neighbours; what is remarkable for the little civilization is its resilience from abysmal depths, which even the phoenix had to struggle with. There were occasions and events which turned to the advantage of the Burmese, the Koch and the *force majeure* like the Britishers. Consequently, the Burmese had to plunder the wealth and possessions of Manipur for seven continuous years and devastate the entire kingdom leaving only the sack cloth and ashes; the Koch king also secured his pound of flesh in terms of hundreds of gold coins and several thousands of silver coins from a debilitated Manipur. The friendly British came, signed a treaty of friendship as early as 1762, opened a political agency and ventured an unsuccessful daybreak military campaign on March 24, 1891, lost Chief Commissioner of Assam and other high officials in the melee, invaded Manipur for the second time in vengeance, defeated the Manipuris and refused to annex the kingdom. The Indian National Army and the Japanese forces selected Manipur as the theatre of the Second World War in their effort to occupy the Indian mainland through the gateway of Imphal and the devastation again followed over the remnants of the

Burmese devastation in the early nineteenth century. In the fast moving pages of history, insurgency gripped the state, shortly after the Second World War and Manipur merged with the Indian Union in 1949 ; since then till 1972, no responsible government was installed in the state and consequently, the seed of Insurgency had taken roots. This is the contemporary Manipuri history in retrospect—the struggle of a two millenia old little civilization to survive in the midst of avalanches of historical epochs. Even mighty civilizations were not spared, when the furious tide of history turned against them.

The small state—in its present reduced size only 1,557 sq. km. bigger than Israel—very often put the Burmese forces to task. D.G.E. Hall unravels, 'It came in due course when the little mountain state of Manipur began a series of raids upon upper Burma which the enfeebled rulers of Awa were quite unable to check. In the sixteenth century Bayinnaung had forced Manipur to recognize his suzerainty, but later it re-asserted its independence' (A History of South East Asia, 1908). John F. Cady notes that Manipuri raids in Upper Burma were curbed by 1749 (South East Asia, 1964). Hall comments, 'Outlying districts (Burma) were lost because when encroachments such as the occupation of the Kabaw valley by the Raja of Manipur took place there was no one capable of expelling the intruders.' On one occasion, the Burmese king came to receive the Manipuri princess, whose hands he asked for from the Manipuri king and hundreds of Manipuri warriors who came in disguise as maids of the princess routed the Burmese. In another military campaign with twenty thousand soldiers, Manipuri king Pamheiba (Garib-Nawaz) made his thrust upto Awa and as soon as the chance turned to his advantage to take over the Burmese capital, the king made his sudden retreat after observing an inauspicious omen in the royal flag. The Burmese in their subsequent raids in Manipur engaged Cassay cavalry (Manipuri horsemen) and Manipuri gunmakers, who were taken as prisoners of war in earlier engagements. The Manipuri Brahmins were used as religious leaders in the Burmese capital. The Burmese retaliations were ruthless and devastating. For continuous seven years, the Burmese robbed the Manipuri civilization of its last traces in the coffers, its human resources and anything that stood on the ground. The human cataclysm continued till Manipuri prince Gambhir Singh with his legendary five hundred heroes, supported by the Britishers, liberated the kingdom from the Burmese yoke. The cartographic aggression was made by incorporating Manipur within the Burmese territory not only for the seven years' devastation but also for the periods during which Manipuris routed the Burmese kings on many occasions. Henry Yule's 18 century map of Burma had not corrected the cartographic aggression on Manipur thereby making the history of Manipur distorted to suit the false claims of the Burmese.

D.G.E. Hall attempted to shed light on the Manipur devastation, 'Assam, however, was not the only state suffering from this fresh outbreak

of Burmese pugnacity. The failure of the Raja of Manipur to attend Bagyidaw's coronation was used as an excuse to dethrone him and devastate his country'. The reason given by Hall appears to be from the official version of the Burmese history. E.T. Dalton construed the rationale of the Burmese hostility, 'At the commencement of the present century, the royal family of Manipur appeared to have aspired to a more costly style of building, as the erection of a gilded palace by Raja Marjeet Singh, was one of the causes that brought upon them the wrath and the armies of the Burmese' (Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, 1872). Vengeance and above all, the passion of the green eyed monster might have influenced the Burmese mind and these two motives are the eternal cause of all upheavals from times immemorial till the contemporary period.

Despite continued postures of belligerency and territorial aggrandisements, the Burmese king signed the Treaty of Yandaboo on February 24, 1826 thereby recognising Gambhir Singh as the king of Manipur. Subsequently with the signing of Kubo valley Agreement in 1834, the Kubo valley, a disputed area nearly half the size of Manipur which till the time of cession was under the authority of Manipuri king, was ceded to Burma. The British had taken up the extreme step of cession of Manipur's disputed territory to Burma with the motive of bringing an appeasement with a belligerent state ; but the appeasement policy was not construed in the true spirit by the other side and the hostility ensued later between Burma and the British. Till Manipur's merger with the Indian Union, the compensation stipulated under the 1834 Agreement was annually paid to Manipur and the treaty did not foreclose the possibility of reversion of Manipur's disputed Kubo valley even after the cession. At present neither the compensation is given nor the reversion of the valley has materialised. The issue had been simply sunk in the depth of the oblivion of time.

The Chinese was another power which made unsuccessful military campaigns against Manipur. Sir James Johnstone records, 'About the year 1250 A.D., a large Chinese force invaded the country (Manipur), and was signally defeated, all who were not killed being made prisoners. They taught the Manipuris Silk culture, and a number of them were settled at Susa Kameng in the valley, where their descendants still continue to live' (Manipur and Naga Hills, 1876). The Chinese army led by a general Moyodana, sent by Chinese king, Peyangu at about 1564 A.D., was completely routed by the Manipuris. J. Roy describes, 'The Chinese king was very much pleased at it and paid a visit to the ruler of Manipur with rich presents. The prisoners were settled in a new village called Khagempalli. To commemorate this victory, Mongyamba (Manipuri king) named his new born son Khagemba' (History of Manipur, 1973).

The bilateral relations of Manipur with the King of Assam, Cachar and Pong were informed by mutual understanding and the need for sharing the warmth of good neighbourliness. Inter-marriage between the royal

family of Manipur with the royal families of Tripura and Assam took place which created conditions for improving the bilateral relations. When the Manipuri king was in distress due to internal palace intrigues or external aggression, the Ahom king stood beside him with liberal military assistance and the Manipuri king also reciprocated by fighting against the enemy of the Ahom king when the need arose.

Noted Assamese historian S.K. Bhuyan refers to Wade's account relating to the military campaign of the Manipuri Raja Jai Singha against the Moamarias, who revolted against the Ahom king of Assam : 'The Moamarias had received accurate intelligence of the designs and route of the Raja's army. On either side of the road a luxuriant vegetation of several years had covered the country with lofty grass and reeds impenetrable to the eye of the travellers. The Moamarias had lined the vicinity of the road with canon which had been conveyed from Rungpoor, and not improbably from Zoorhath (Jorhat).'

Wade's above account continues the narration of the campaign, 'The young prince (Jai Singh), by design or accident, passed unmolested, entered Gurgaon where he defeated a body of Moamarias, repaired to Rungpoor, forced his way into the fortress, and massacred the Moamarias of every age and sex. But his triumph and cruelty were checked by the news which he received from his enemies that the concerted batteries had been opened on his father's army, and a great number of his men had perished. The victorious prince returned and experienced a similar fate' (S.K. Bhuyan, ed., *Tungkhungia Buranji or History of Assam, 1681-1826 A.D.*).

When Swargadeo Lakshmi Singha, 'the powerful 'heavenly' Ahom king was dethroned for the first time in Ahom history by Raha Moran, the leader of the Moamarian rebellion, the Manipuri princess Kuranganayani, married to the Ahom king proved her Spartan prowess by physically removing Raha Moran the brave rebel leader from the theatre of the palace under siege and created the conditions for the restoration of lost throne to the Ahom king. Since Kuranganayani's military achievements did not conform to the Hindu ethos of subordinated and cowardly women, her role in the crisis had not been given due recognition and justice, she actually deserved ; but her role was decisive in putting down the significant rebellion.

Tungkhungia Buranji records her singular and extraordinary courage in the midst of a nearly successful Moamarian rebellion : 'The Magalu (Meetei) princess (Kuranganayani) with a sword in her hand followed him (Raghav Moran) along with other ladies, each armed with a *dao* (Assamese dagger). There was not a single male.

### **Kuranganayani Kills Raha**

Ram-Krishnai then gave the hint by uttering a few words. The Magalu princess, recognising the voice, struck Raha with a sword just

below the calf. Raga fell down with his face towards the ground. Then Rama-Krishnai who was also there severed his head. The dola-bearers announced by shouting, 'The former king of the Tungkhungia family has become the king again. The people should not disperse'. It is relevant to highlight the chivalry of the Manipuri women in this context. On one occasion, when the enemy of Meetei king, on learning that the king left the palace, invaded the royal palace, Meetei queen Linthoingambi relinquished the modesty and reclusion, disguised herself in the war robe of the Meetei king, came out in the midst of the engagements and drove out the invaders. On two occasions in the early and mid-twentieth century, the Manipuri women, perhaps the most industrious women in the world, led two movements against the power that be. They may be described virtually the harbingers of not only the women's Lib. movement of today but also leaders of social advancement in the true sense of the term.

Neighbouring Cachar was a sanctuary for the Meetei princes in trouble ; it was hospitable to the dethroned Meetei princes on many occasions. Gambhir Singh occupied the whole of Cachar and his two brothers ruled for some time till they relinquished (J. Roy, *History of Manipur*). The Meetei princes had no territorial ambitions over Cachar. The Manipuris received the immigrant Brahmins from many parts of the Bharat of the medieval period who did not find much difficulty in getting themselves acculturated by the Meetei ethos. But when some people from the West contested the authority of the Meetei princes, they were taken over to Manipur as defeated adversaries. M. McCulloch wrote about them, 'The Meeyangs are descendants of people from the Western plains who were captured in arms against Munnipore, and some who immigrated of their own accord. They amongst themselves always speak their own language which is a dialect of Hindee, but they all understood and most of them can speak Munniporee.'

The Meetei kings confronted seasonal onslaughts from the Highlander chiefs with whom they were normally in good terms. As regards campaigns from across the frontiers of Manipur, the kings had no restraint ; they were ruthless. Sir James Johnstone recorded, 'Even upto the Naga Hills campaign of 1879-80, the Nagas regarded Manipur as the greater power of the two (Manipuri power and British power), because her conduct was consistent ; if she threatened, she acted. One British subject after another might be murdered with impunity, but woe betide the village that murdered a subject of Manipur. A force of Manipuris was instantly despatched, the village was attacked, destroyed, and ample compensation was exacted.'

The Anglo-Manipuri wars in 1891 were wars of resistance of the Manipuris against the British. The historians of that period or of the present century had not given fair account of the wars of Manipuri resistance which were historically significant ; the colonial and imperial power

was boldly challenged by the Manipuris for the first time in March, 1891 and for the second time in April, 1891. Bias or prejudice of the historians is a painful fact. Historian E.H. Carr had rightly warned, 'Study the historian before you begin to study the facts' and 'The bias of historian can be judged by the hypothesis he adopts'. Historians, for inexplicable reasons, undermined or even deliberately ignored the Anglo-Manipuri wars in March and April, 1891.

The Anglo-Manipuri friendship treaty was signed for the first time in 1762 between Chittagong Chief Verelst and Maharaja Jai Singh's representative Hari Das Gosain. In 1835, the British decided to retain a Political Agent in Manipur with a view to preserving a friendly intercourse, preventing border feuds and disturbances. The Political Agent acted like an ambassador in the country. But the British interfered very often in the domestic matters of the country, although they did the same diplomatically and shrewdly. The British interference in that period is not much different from the Super power political interference in the present day world ; it is very difficult to say that the present day Super powers had refrained from activities ranging from mild interference to covert military action or even direct involvement in the developing countries. When the British interference had crossed the normal limit, they did not hesitate to invade the small country. Mr. Quinton, in the course of interference in the Manipur administration, invaded the Meetei palace on March 24, 1891 when all the deceptive stratagems, planned to capture the Senapati of Manipur miserably failed.

In his report *i.e.* the report of the Government of India to the Secretary of State, Lord Lansdowne (along with F.S. Roberts and G. Chesney) officially recorded, 'What passed at this interview (Mr. Grimwood's efforts to hold an interview with Senapati Tikendrajit after the failure of Mr. Quinton's covert action to arrest the Senapati on March 22, 1891) is not known ; but the Chief Commissioner decided to arrest the Senapati in his palace, and at dawn on the 24th Colonel Skene, commanding the Chief Commissioner's escort, entered the Palace enclosure, which is very extensive, with a force of 250 men. He found four Manipuri guns and 6,000 men in position, and a serious engagement ensued. Soon afterwards the enemy brought guns to bear on the building, and it was shelled for three hours. At eight O'clock an armistice was arranged.—At midnight the enemy's guns again opened on the Residency at a distance of 150 yards. Their fire was very effective, and the building was dismantled. By two O'clock in the morning the position had become untenable ; and ammunition running short, the officers in the Residency decided upon a retreat towards Cachar (Simla, April 8, 1891).

In another Report, Assistant Commissioner P.R. Gurdon recorded, 'Political negotiations having failed, there was no remedy but to enforce the order of the Government of India. It was decided, however, to first try and see whether a truce (as the Manipuris won the day in the battle)

could be obtained, and negotiation again re-opened. The Chief Commissioner accordingly wrote a letter to the Regent ; which was sent across to the palace by a Manipuri. At the same time the "ceasefire" bugles were sounded by our side : '(Assam Secretariat Foreign A. No. 176 dated Shillong, the 10th April, 1891 in N. Khelchandra, ed., Documents of Anglo-Manipuri War 1891, Part I).'

The letter following the ceasefire from British side was signed by the Chief Commissioner Mr. Quinton. The letter ran as : 'On what condition will you cease firing on us, and give us time to communicate with the Viceroy, and repair the telegraph ?' (Ethel Grimwood, My Three Years in Manipur).

The next Anglo-Manipuri War closely came on the heels of the British defeat and humiliation in the March engagements. In the March war, Mr. Quinton, Chief Commissioner of Assam, Colonel Skene, Mr. Cossins, Lt. Simpson and Mr. Grimwood were executed. In retaliation against the March war, the British troops stormed from three different directions and after a fierce contest at Khongjom where the Manipuri heroes under the leadership of Paona died in harness and the British took control of the capital on April 27, 1891. After the defeat in the April war, Prince Koireng (*alias* Tikendrajit) and General Thangal were hanged to death on August 13, 1891 and Maharaja Kulachandra and his officials were transported for life. 'Hansards' of the British Parliament covered more than two hundred pages on the Manipur events and the question of annexation became a hot issue in the Parliament. Under the normal circumstances, Manipur deserved nothing sort of annexation to the British Crown and that was the rule of the thumb applied indiscriminately to all the princely states in the subcontinent of India.

What constituted an exception to the general rule of annexation was a desideratum of the conscience of the Crown following the March and April wars with a little but courageous power. Queen Victoria helped herself by sending a Telegram on August 1, 1891 to Lord Lansdowne : 'Trust Senapati will not be executed. He was not guilty of murder'. Review of *Review*, London commented, 'The elephant has crushed the rat, but the question whether or not the rat was in the right is being hotly discussed in England' (1891). Indian periodicals, led by *Samachar* protested that the English should not have the power to hang the Manipuri prisoners (of war), had Manipur been a big state and the war escalated for a few days more as both sides captured armies and officers as prisoners (of war) of the other side ; it also commented that the events were contrary to the provisions of International Law.

Manipur was not annexed to the Crown. The Proclamation ran as follows : 'It is hereby notified that the Manipur State has become liable to the penalty of annexation, and is now at the disposal of the Crown :

It is further notified that Her Majesty the Queen, Empress of India, has been pleased to forgo Her right to annex to Her Indian Dominions

the territories of the Manipur State ; and has graciously assented to the re-establishment of Native Rule' (Sd/- by H.M. Durand, Secretary to the Government of India). Manipur was obviously and very much unmistakably an exception to the rule of thumb.

The political status of Manipur and the farcical court martial of the Manipuri King, Senapati, General and other high officials still bear profound historical meaning. The British did not have the necessary jurisdiction to try the Manipuri princes and the Argument of Barrister Mono Mohan Ghose of Bengal was based on the prevailing state of International Law of that epoch. An extract from his statement is as follows :

“A person who is not a British subject, cannot be guilty of treason so long as he resides in a country which is not British territory... The previous history of Manipur shows that the English never acquired Manipur by conquest, but our Government entered into certain treaties with the former rulers of Manipur whereby a certain amount of protection was promised to Manipur on certain conditions. Manipur paid no tribute to the English. The State has all along been governed by its own laws, the Raja of Manipur exercised Sovereign authority over his subjects. The State has its own executive which is independent of the British Government. No doubt our Government has by treaty protected the Ruler of Manipur from foreign invasion,... Treaties of equal alliance freely contracted between independent States do not impair their sovereignty...I have been informed by the Foreign Secretary that ‘the Manipur Raja entered into no treaty or engagement with the British Government since 1876’. We may therefore take it that there is no such express reservation or declaration of allegiances such as I submit is requisite ...I submit then, that Manipur was not on a lower level than the semi-sovereign States of which European history furnishes several instances.”

Barrister M.M. Ghose's learned argument was duly informed by the historical facts and the prevailing International Law :

“That Manipur is not a part of British India, and not subject to our laws, will, I apprehend, not be questioned....It will, I think, not be disputed that Manipur stands upon a far higher footing than Mayurbhunj, and, so far as I have been able to gather from books and documents accessible to me, the only evidence I have been able to find, tends to show that our Government has dealt with Manipur on the footing of its being a *Sovereign power in alliance with, and not owing any allegiance to the Queen, such as may be due from some of the Native States in India.*

Now, I take it that if Manipur has been dealt with as an “*Asiatic Power*” within the meaning of the above section, it is very

important evidence to show the absolute independent character of its status. In the year 1865, the Government prosecuted one Keifa Singh, at Cachar, for having committed an offence against the Raja of Manipur under the above section (Sec. 125 IPC). The prisoner was convicted, and, in dealing with his appeal, the Calcutta High Court said :—“The prisoner has been convicted of waging war against the *Manipur Raja, an Asiatic Sovereign* in alliance with the Queen....”

These cases furnish evidence of the fact that the *British Government* in prosecuting, and English Courts in convicting these prisoners, *have dealt with Manipur as an independent Sovereign Power*. Has anything happened since 1867 which tends to rebut the evidence ?

The fact of Mr. Quinton sending Mr. Grimwood on the 23rd March to demand the surrender of the Jubraj, or ‘*a written authority to arrest him*’, also goes to show that at that time, at any rate, the Sovereign and independent character of the State was recognised by the Chief Commissioner. (*emphasis added*).

It is respectfully submitted that, according to the recognised law of nations, a sudden armed invasion of the Palace of an independent Sovereign by the troops of another power, with or without a declaration of war, would be an act which it would be the duty of the soldiers and officers of the invaded Sovereign to resist, as soon as they became aware of the invasion.” (Manipur. *Did the Manipur Princes obtain a Fair Trial?* London 1891). There is no denying the fact that the British trial of her bolder and more daring enemy was a farce.

The Anglo-Manipuri relation, the sovereign status of Manipur, the treaty which do not speak about Manipur’s allegiance to Crown, the armed hostilities between Manipur and the British on two events at the instance of the British alone, their faceless brutal invasion in palace and subsequent prayer for a truce in March war, 1891, their show of force in April war, 1891, the heroic resistance of the Manipuris were the events that influenced the British public opinion and the Parliament to debate on Manipuri events threadbare. The heroic resistance of the Manipuris against the mightiest Super power of the world of that period on two major events was acknowledged by Queen Victoria in her Proclamation to forego Her right to annex Manipur, following the defeat of Manipur in the armed hostilities. The Queen sent telegram to the then British Government of India that the Hero, Tikendrajit, should not be executed. Lord Lansdowne thought that the humiliation, his mighty government suffered at the hands of Manipuri heroes could be neutralised only by the execution of the Manipuri heroes and by transportation of the King and his thirteen officials.

The Anglo-Manipuri War, 1891 was a harbinger of anti-colonial struggle for many people in chains elsewhere in the world. Historian

Jyotirmoy Roy comments, 'The stand taken by Senapati Tikendrajit and his martyrdom continued to be a source of inspiration to the revolutionaries of Bengal for a long time'. Without being annexed to the British Crown, Manipur continued its independent political status till 1949 under the protection of the British paramountcy ; the British protection fluctuated from time to time ranging from giving advice to the Manipuri king in his administration to limited interference on the subject of law and order in Manipur. As the paramountcy lapsed in 1947, Manipur adopted its own political Constitution, under which the Constitutional monarchy was adopted and continued till Manipur's merger with the Indian Union on October 15, 1949. Considering the pre-conditions that brought about the merger, it may be fairly said that the merger was not unconditional and also that the pre-conditions for the merger, based more on acts of faith between the Government of India and the Government of Manipur under its municipal law prevailing at that time warranted maximum autonomy for the state of Manipur. This view had been made all the more valid by the assurance given by the leaders of Indian National Congress and the Government of India on the eve of integration of other Native states. That Manipur had not been annexed by the British Queen even when the outcome of the war warranted the annexation had been a national demand and ethos of the Manipuris for quite a long time. Over and above this, the Manipuri heritage of a Constitutional government starting from 5th century A.D., specifically from 1100 A.D. till 1949 cannot be written off or washed out overnight simply because the events following the lapse of British paramountcy brought her within the fold of the newly born Indian Union which is and ought to be a federation in the true sense of the term. Its unique heritage which the British Crown honoured and two millenina old early state and civilization deserve careful study and unbiased understanding. The present volume, within its limited compass, attempts to bring to focus the least known aspects of the little civilization of South East Asia through the ages.

### BOUQUETS TO THE ARCHITECTS

History books do not have a standard set or pattern. There are histories written by one man—often a highly erudite individual, who usually fills his flower basket with as many flowers as he chooses and above all, not more than what his container can bear ; but one never picks up the flowers of the entire garden for his little basket. Herein lies the subjective selection of the facts by the historian. E.H. Carr had already warned in time that the historian should be known first before his history is read. At the micro level, for instance, there was only one Second World War, yet there are two different histories—the allied version and the axis version. A historian is never barring the great ones above his time,

race, culture, religion and superstition. The absence of a total history of Manipur for a long time could find the plausible explanation in the above propositions.

A single writer's history has many advantages like coherence, consistency and more freedom of the historian to select facts ; its disadvantage is that the freedom usually degenerates into academic licence. The present volume, being a collective work of historians and social scientists connected with historiography should be naturally different from one-author-account and it may even suffer from apparent yet trivial inconsistencies, but the contributions surprisingly do not reveal pronounced incoherence ; in one sense, the corroboration of the historical facts by nearly two dozen specialists working independently all the more reinforce the objectivity and realism of the facts and minimise the chances of subjectivity of judgement. Even then, certain weak points might be present inadvertently and this disadvantage may be construed to have left adequate room for investigations by specialists in future. History should not have been a science at all, had it been not much different from fossils, rocks and folk tales or myths. Many more unrevealed facts deserve to be brought to light. The history of Manipur is not an exception to the general rule and hence, many of the earlier historical concepts about Manipur call for a fresh re-examination on a wider canvass of the history and civilization of mankind. In this context, the volume modestly aims at pinpointing certain lofty features of the little civilization that Manipur was. One can say without much inconvenience that here is a history to start with.

The contributors to the volume are specialists in their respective discipline, with fairly long experiences and intimacy with the subjects. The writers do not require introduction at least in the state of Manipur ; as the volume is intended for readers in the country or from abroad, their introduction had been given elsewhere in the book. The editor is morally obliged to acknowledge the dispassionate and painstaking efforts of the learned contributors, who have responded to the invitation with no string or condition attached. We do not find adequate words to praise the magnanimity of the writers, who have neither expected and *quid Pro quo* for their invaluable intellectual exercises nor claimed any credit. We are confident that by their completely dispassionate approach to the themes, the moral quality, say the objectivity of the present work had been enhanced beyond expectation.

In reciprocation of the detached gestures of the noble contributors who expected nothing in return, the editor too sincerely felt that he should not ask for any aid, assistance or grant—financial, technical or otherwise from any source whatsoever, without which normally, no work of this magnitude could be produced. We have accepted the moral obligation arising out of the project and one cannot say with an open heart that there were no difficulties in undertaking such a venture. The projects of this kind could have been done much easier and even much faster by

governmental agencies or government sponsored team of scholars. In that case, their success is unquestioned from the very moment, the direction 'Go' is given. We feel proud that despite the initial disadvantages, the book would remain, untied to any string ; it would not be a court history of the modern era nor a lone voice—howsoever legitimate it could be. The royalty, derived from the sale of the book will be entrusted to a TRUST which shall espouse the cause of intellectual advancement of the Manipuris. In due honour of the heroes and martyrs of the little civilization through the ages, the book is dedicated to the Martyrs of this land and civilization.

We remain grateful to the internationally recognised anthropologist Professor C. von Fürer-Haimendorf, of the University of London for writing a learned and erudite *Foreword* to the volume and also to Shri K.M. Mittal, the adventurous and daring publisher of the volumes under the title, who had encouraged me to plan and execute this venture since early 1985. We remain thankful to one and all who thought for and helped us in materialising the publication of the present volume of the series.

Gauhati University  
September, 1987

—NAOREM SANAJAOBA