

State And Economy

In Pre-Colonial Manipur

Edited By
J.B. Bhattacharjee

One of the longest surviving kingdoms in Indian sub-continent, the Meitei Kingdom in Manipur, the foundation of which goes back to 1st century AD, succumbed to British colonialism in 19th century. What enabled the kingdom to rise and to survive such a long period? To find an answer, the Institute of Northeast India Studies held a workshop at the Department of History, Manipur University, Imphal in 2007 and continued the dialogue on state and economy complementarities thereafter. This is because one of the findings of the workshop was that the society and economy in pre-colonial Manipur was under total control of the state. The land, forests, mines and minerals, agriculture, industry and craft, including dress and ornaments of the people, were regulated by the kings. As a result, natural and human resources were not fully explored, technology remained backward and the economy could not develop to its full potentials. *State and Economy in Pre-Colonial Manipur* is the outcome of that exercise in the model of state formation studies, involving both young and experienced scholars, mostly from Manipur. The authors have gone beyond the rich treasure of historical chronicles of Manipur to explore the pre-history, archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics and all other extant evidence of material culture to focus on the social and economic foundations of the Meitei State.

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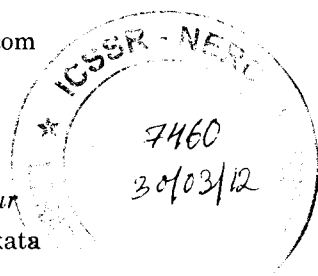
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1

Evolution of the Meitei State The Formation of Early State in Manipur

Gangmumei Kamei

State and State Formation

The state, as a political institution, has been looked upon by the social scientists from various angles. A section of the classical political thinkers considered it as a definitive territory, having a government with external sovereign relations. To the sociologists, the state is a social organization which has given expression to the existing relations in a society and to the idea pertaining to power, authority, force, justice, property and the laws. The ancient Greek and Roman thinkers thought that the state was coterminous with the society. On the other hand, the great German philosopher, Hegel, described state as the 'March of God on Earth'. To the Marxists, the state was a political structure created by the propertied class to manage the complex social relationship and to protect the interests of the rich and the powerful. This facial of the state emerges from Frederick (Friedrich) Engels, according to whom, the distinguishing features of the state are the

territory, establishment of the public power, imposition of taxes, introduction of public debts and the authority of the bureaucracy. Therefore, the state is the highest form of - or the most powerful - human institution ever created by the human. These views are indeed so well known that one and everyone can go on repeating them. However, all these perceptions put together, the state is essentially a social institution with the basic features, such as, population, territoriality, legitimacy (power and authority), and sovereignty.¹

The historical understanding of the state formation processes in different parts of the world calls for specific set of evidences in all specific cases. In history - and for that matter, in all social sciences - the state formation is the process of evolution of a people or a social group occupying a territory into a political society through different stages of social and economic functions. This political society is the state. However, there seem to be no single paradigm to explain the process of state formation. This is evident from the seminal work of Ronald Cohen and E. R. Service² who observed that there is no clear cut or simple set of causal statement that explains the phenomenon of the state. In fact, Cohen in an earlier work had asserted, "The formation of state is a funnel like progression of interactions in which a variety of pre-state structures responding to the different determinants of change are bound by other unresolvable conflicts to choose additional and more complex laws of political hierarchy. Once a particular solution is hit upon, the structural features of the adaptation and benefits cause these polities to converge culturally and socially to the early states."³ In the ancient Indian context, Romila Thapar observed that there is no single factor of state formation, that the state formation is a complex process in which a range of factors may be crucial to apply to varying situations, and that the form of the state would vary according to the nature of its origin.⁴ Henri J. M.

Claessen and Peter Skalnik, in their monumental work,⁵ encountered (i) the population growth and population pressure, (ii) war, threat of war or conquest, raids, (iii) conquest, (iv) progress in production and the promotion of surplus, tribute, affluence, (v) ideology and legitimization, and (vi) the influence of already existing states as the major factors of state formation. J. B. Bhattacharjee⁶ observed that all those factors, as enumerated by Claessen and Skalnik, were relevant in the context of the formation of early states from the ethnic social base in Northeast India, although he emphasized social stratification – caused by economic differentiation and ritual status - and legitimacy to be more important factors than others in this region.

Although for the present purpose of studying the evolution of the Meitei State it is not proposed to go into the origin of the state as speculated by the political philosophers and the sociologists, it is certainly necessary to understand the state and the typology of states for a clearer perception of the processes of state formation.

Typology of the States

Morton M. Fried classified the states into (i) pristine state and (ii) secondary state. The pristine state is also called primary state. The pristine or primary states, like the primitive societies, are simple, early, original, primary and lacking in development, while the secondary states, which are founded due to the external pressure from the existing states, are sponsored by the existing developing states which impose their own model on the formation of the new state.⁷ Henri J. M. Claessen and Peter Skalnik also classified the states into two, namely, (i) early and (ii) modern. According to them, the early states are simple, non-industrialized and pre-capitalistic, while the modern states are complex, industrialized and developing.⁸

The formation of the pristine or early states has been explained by two theoretical formulations; namely, the 'conflict process' as propounded by Frederick Engels and the 'evolutionary process' as proposed by Morton H. Fried. Frederick Engels, whose formulations eventually became the basis of the Marxian Theory of State,⁹ explained the formation of the states on the basis of intra-societal conflicts and the forms of class struggle through four stages of social and political development, namely, (i) primitive communism, (ii) emergence of private property, (iii) formation of social and economic classes, and (iv) emergence of the state.¹⁰ According to Engels, the primitive communism was the first stage of social formation in which there was no property, no trade and commerce, no class of rich or poor, and no despotic ruler. In course of time, the individuals started acquiring things from the common or community's pool of resources, and the property so acquired by the individuals emerged as private property of those individuals. The creation of the private property led to the concentration of property or wealth in the hands of the few and resulted in the formation of a powerful social and economic class which possessed wealth. The more dominant ones within this class then articulated themselves to expand the size of their respective individual private property and to establish control over the resources in the territory through concerted policies and actions. This dominant class then created a military power in order to protect its interests. In the process, a structure of productivity, based on surplus production due to the technological development, was also created. The trade in surplus commodities resulted in the change in the nature of economy from consumption or subsistence level to that of production of commodities for exchange. The new type of economy invariably facilitated the emergence and growth of middlemen, entrepreneurs and capital. The class structure so evolved was perpetuated through the state.¹¹

Fried's perception of the evolution of the pristine states passed through three stages with corresponding social and political formations, as shown below:¹²

| Stages | Form of Social Formation | Polity Formation |
|-----------|---|------------------------|
| Stage I | Egalitarianism [Primitive Society] | Band and Tribal Polity |
| Stage II | Ranked Society [Diversified Society] | Chieftdom |
| Stage III | Stratified Society | State |

Claessen and Skalnik also identified three stages in the evolution of the early states as they classified the early states into (i) inchoate early state, (ii) typical early state, and (iii) transitional early state, on the basis of the levels of social and economic development. Thus, in the inchoate states the kinship ties are still very dominant, in typical states such ties are counter-balanced by the territorial ones, and in transitional states the kinship ties have already been marginalized by the dominance of the appointed officials.¹³

It may not be wrong to observe that 'evolution' is the common dominant theme between the analyses of Engels, Fried and Claessen-Skalnik. There is also some continuity in the formulations of all analysts of state formations, beginning with Frederick Engels to whom the origin of the state formation studies and the Marxian theory of state are unanimously attributed.¹⁴ Engels' emphasis was on 'conflict'. However, the Marxian model, in which Engels' formulation is pre-eminent, has been found by many scholars to be Eurocentric and inappropriate to explain the evolution of states in the Indian subcontinent. In the Indian context, Romila Thapar explained the evolution of the pristine states in the Vedic period as the transformation of the lineage society. According to this explanation, the lineage, which was

a corporate group of unilineal kins with a formalized system of authority as the binding force, gradually transformed into a combined lineage and territorial group. The stratification led to the emergence of chieftainship, and a sharper stratification of the chieftainship was germinal to the state formation. Thus, according to Thapar, the lineage society had gradually transformed into the state.¹⁵

In the context of the Meitei state formation in early Manipur, the formulations of Romila Thapar and of Claessen and Skalnik seem to be very relevant. As we proceed, we shall see that there was an evolution of a pristine state over a long period of time in ancient and medieval Manipur. The process of state formation was evolutionary in character. The evolution of the state was through a transformation of the lineage-based clan-chiefdom of the Meiteis to the state. The state formation was also a process of cultural evolution. The creation of culture was a great human achievement by the use of which the society tamed and governed its members, and created and maintained the complex social organization. Culture had technological, economic, religious, artistic and recreational functions. All these depended on the ability of the political aspects of culture to integrate and protect the society. The society grew and declined depending on the ability to preserve the authority. The growth and decline of the culture also depended on the ability of the state to preserve its culture and civilization. As regards the pristine state, our focus is on the factors contributing to the emergence of the pristine society and state. The major factors of state formation enumerated by Claessen and Skalnik, namely, growth of population and population pressure, war, war machine, threat of war, conquest, progress in production and creation of surplus, imposition of tribute, affluence, ideology and legitimization and the influence of the existing states, are all meaningful in variable degrees in case of the evolution of the Meitei State in Manipur.¹⁶

Emergence of the Meitei Clan-Chiefdoms

The Meiteis in ancient Manipur had developed a lineage based social system, and the polities, which as they ultimately emerged, were clan-chiefdoms and clan-principalities. Historical texts and literary works refer to the presence of a large number of ethnic and social groups in ancient Manipur valley. These were the proto-Meitei social groups, like the Mangang, Angom, Luwang, Khaba, Nganba, Khuman, Moirang, Sarang, Leishangthem, Heiram Khunjam, Chenglei, Haorok Konthou, Manting Mara, Lera Khongang, Thanga, Kambong, Ulok Ushai, Haokha-Lokkha, Ningol Latam, Phantek Khuyon, Chakpa, etc. There were also hill tribal communities like the Anal, Tangkhul and Kabui (Rongmei). These tribes and social groups, except the hill tribes, were socially organized into seven clans of the Meiteis during the reign of King Nongda Lairen Pakhangba who founded the Ningthouja dynasty. The clan genealogies give the account of the origin and genealogical trees of the concerned clans showing their historicity. Myths were created to provide the background of the origin of the clans which were constituted into the Meitei social fold.¹⁷

Pre-Pakhangba Polity

The historical texts make references to a large number of pre-Pakhangba chiefs and rulers who ruled in different periods of the traditional 'Meitei Age' (Era), known as the *Chak* (viz., *Hayi Chak*, *Haya Chak*, *Langba Chak* and *Konna Chak*). Of these accounts, *Kangbalon*, a chronicle which is supposed have been compiled during the reign of Khuyoi Tompak, the son and successor of Pakhangba, gives a brief account of several rulers and chiefs. Kangba was the first chief of the Meiteis. His successors were Maliya Phambalcha (founder of the Era of *Maliya Phambacha*), Nongdamhan and Taohuireng (who faced a slave rebellion), Kaksuba, Tonkonba (discoverer of the wild paddy), Pitingkoi, Lambicha,

Sopaiba, Puthiba (inventor of the plough), Kuptreng, and Sentreng.¹⁸ The accounts of these rulers present a picture of the emerging chieftainship, although we cannot establish the historicity of their rule in a chronological frame.

The Clan-Chiefdoms

The clan was both a social and a political institution among the ancient Meiteis. This duality in the nature and function of the clan is a unique feature of the Meitei lineage system. The clan is known as the *Salai*, which literally means ancestor god of the lineage (*Sa* = *Sagei*, *Lai* = God). There was no *salai* system in the legendary period, though there are references to the *sagei* (lineage or families). It was during the reign of King Pakhangba that the clans were regrouped into seven and recognized as parts of the Meitei social system. The seven clans were Ningthouja (the royal clan, Mangang), Angom, Luwang, Kha-Nganba (combination of Khaba and Nganba), Sarang Leishangthem (combination of Sarang, Leishangthem and Changlei), Khuman and Moirang. Each of the original clans had a territorial region under its occupation and control. Smaller groups were absorbed into the seven clans along with their territory. Pakhangba is thus credited with the creation of the Meitei *Salai* system which became the cornerstone of the Meitei society and state.¹⁹

The clan (*Salai*) in the Meitei society became both a social category and a political organization when the seven clans were created. Each clan had a delineated territory which became the political space of the clan chiefdom. The name of the clan was identical to the name of the territory in possession of the particular clan. The clan was also a linguistic identity, because the members of a clan spoke in the same dialect. In course of time, all the clans spoke the Meitei language which was an outcome of political hegemony of the Ningthoujas who called themselves as the Meiteis. However, in a clan territory the people of other clans also could migrate and settle down permanently.

The chief of a clan was called *Piba*, who was also the social head of the clan. He was originally the head of the lineage (*sagei*) and head of the village inhabited by his kinsmen. The *Piba* was expected by his clansmen to be the protector of the clan lands, including the agricultural lands, forests, rivers and lakes. The chief of the clan by his moral and social authority and physical prowess organized a group of armed kinsmen for the defence of the land and the protection of life and community. The *Piba* became ultimately the protector of the land and people within the clan territory. So the *Piba*, the social head of the clan, became the political authority with his command over the armed militias which were raised and looked after by him for the protection of the people of his clan and its territory. With this authority the *Piba* became a *Ningthou* (chief or ruler or king) of the clan within the clan territory which ultimately grew into a principality or chiefdom.

As the concept of clan territory emerged, the clan land was considered as communal land of the clan with the collective responsibility of the community to protect the land. The land within the clan chiefdom was owned by the clan in common where the individual families were allowed individual land holdings. They also enjoyed the right to use the common land like the forests, rivers and lakes. The *Ningthou's* foremost duty was the protection of the people and the territory. He exercised his authority over the military force for the performance of this duty. The members of the clan, and later on all the inhabitants of the principality, were to render military service under the command of the *Ningthou*. It was the beginning of the compulsory military service to the ruler, known as the *Lallup* system. The chief also established his individual ownership over portions of lands out of the common lands of the clan. He compelled his kinsmen and other subjects to render manorial service to him for agricultural production. Thus, he acquired enough food

grains for the maintenance of the royal households and for the administrative establishment of the principality. He asked the subjects to cut timber from the forests for building houses in the royal palace and for manufacturing boats. He also asked those among the subjects who possessed the required skill and experience for different types of specialized activities to render such services to him. In return of the services rendered by the people, the chief was endowed with the responsibility of performing the religious rites and rituals for the well being of the entire clan and the chiefdom with the help of the priest. Thus, he combined in himself the role of the *Piba* (social head), *Ningthou* (ruler) and the *Maiba* (high priest). However, the chief was the *Piba* in respect of his own clan only. Ultimately, he was the *Ningthou*, i.e., the political head or ruler or the chief of the clan-principality or chiefdom (which might have included several original clans), and in that capacity he was the ruler of all within the principality, including the immigrants from other Meitei clans and other ethnic groups who have been allowed to settle in his principality.

The clan genealogies give the list of chiefs of the clans who ruled in succession, whereas the clan chronicles give brief historical accounts of the respective clans. However, the Moirang and the Khuman chronicles are important for their political history and the account of their polity as well. The reason may be that these two chiefdoms offered resistance to the Ningthouja supremacy for a long time. They were the last two among the chiefdoms to accept the suzerainty of the Ningthouja chiefs. The Angom, Khaba, Nganba, Sarang and Leishangthem polity did not develop beyond rudimentary chiefship (*Ningthou*), the heads of those clans having accepted feudatory status in the court of the Nigthouja chief much earlier than the Moirang and the Khuman chiefs. The *Angam Ningthou* and the *Luwang Ningthou* are frequently mentioned in the chronicles among the feudatories in the

Ningthouja court. The income to the chief or chiefdom came in the form of tributes from the people, including the lesser clans and ethnic groups at the village levels who came under the hegemony or control of the respective chiefs. As the *Piba* of the clan, the chief got financial support from the heads of the sub-clans or sub-lineages (*sagei*) of his clan (*salai*) and the kinsmen of the clan as a whole.²⁰

The Meitei State: Foundation of the Ningthouja Dynasty

The establishment of the Ningthouja kingdom with the seat of authority at Kangla in the heartland of the Manipur valley by Nongda Lairen Pakhangba marked the beginning of the Meitei State. The emergence of the Ningthouja dynasty was an outcome of the struggle between the various ethnic groups and the clan chiefdoms. There were also other ethnic groups who attained the status of clan or sub-clan within the Meitei society. There was indeed a perpetual conflict for a very long time among the clans for the occupation of Kangla which was the seat of political power, religion and culture of the Meiteis. In the Meitei psyche, Kangla was regarded as the navel of the earth and the centre of the Meitei worldview and universe.

Pakhangba occupied Kangla after defeating the Khabas. He also defeated Poireiton, a leader of the colonizers to the Manipur valley. This event is attributed by some chronicles to the first century AD. Pakhangba was supported by several clans, viz. Angom, Luwang, Mangang, Khuman, Moirang and Chakpa. The royal chronicles described him as the founding monarch of the ruling family. Thus, the *Pakhangba Phambal*²¹ recorded that Pakhangba was given the title of *Meidingu*, a corruption of *Meitei-Ngu*, i.e., Lord of the Meiteis. He was the first monarch to have performed the coronation ceremony. His reign saw the reorganization and improvement of the Meitei social and political structure. It was he who

organized the proto-Meitei ethnic groups into seven clans of the Meiteis. He became the head of the Meitei social confederacy and the head of the Meitei polity. The fact that Pakhangba was crowned as the king of the Meiteis (*Meidingu* or *Meitei-Ngu*) might lead to a query whether the ancient Meiteis had already developed the institution of monarchy or kingship or whether Pakhangba just declared himself as the monarch of the Meiteis. If we are to accept the proto-historical accounts of political formations before the emergence of the Ningthouja dynasty, it becomes clear that the Meiteis had already developed the concept of monarchy. There are also references to Yaibirok, the mother of Pakhangba, who made serious attempts to make her son assume the kingship of the Meiteis at Kangla. However, we are short of historical evidence to trace the details of the Meitei polity before the accession of Pakhangba to the throne of Kangla. In any case, he created the administrative machinery of a state which was followed by his successors. As a matter of fact, all the kings of the Ningthouja dynasty who ruled in Manipur after Pakhangba claimed their descent directly from Pakhangba.²²

Growth of the Meitei State

The Meitei kings ruled from Kangla. They gradually established their complete control over the forest rich plain areas of the basin of the Imphal and Iril rivers in northern Manipur valley, which was a part of the Ningthouja clan-principality. The forests were cleared and agriculture was practiced in the upper valleys of the two rivers. In the early stage, the broadcasting and shifting cultivation (*Pamlou*) were practiced. Later on, they took to wet rice cultivation. In the central part of the valley, there were swampy areas with large number of lakes and marshes which were required to be drained continuously. The water from the swampy areas was drained through three rivers – Imphal, Iril and Nambul. The kings employed the labour of the people through the

Lallup system in dredging the rivers and correcting or changing the courses of the rivers. Irrigation was undertaken directly by the state. These rivers also provided the waterways. The swampy areas and lakes were traversed by waterways in which the canoes were used in large number. The state penetrated into the thickly forested Nongmaijing hills and the Kaubru mountain for the supply of timber, collection of forest products, and catching of wild elephants for the royal stable and the armed forces.

With absolute control over the fertile plains of northern Imphal valley and the forests of the surrounding mountains, the Meitei rulers had acquired enough resources to strengthen and expand the boundary of the state. In the meantime, there was already enough population for engagement in state sponsored irrigation works and for the development of agriculture. The dredging of the rivers and the draining out of water was also resulting in land reclamation in the marshy regions making new areas available for agriculture and settlement of the immigrants. The rulers organized the militias as the Meiteis were a martial race. The state also minimized the menace of ravages caused by the wild animals, like tiger, leopard and boar in the foothill regions. The thinly populated areas in the valley and the foothills were opened up for the settlement of the immigrants who contributed to the increase of population, productivity, revenue and wealth of the state.²³

State under Naothingkhong

The Meitei state seems to have gradually expanded till about the eighth century AD. The *Naothingkhong Phambal Khaba*, a historical text dealing with the adventures and coronation of King Naothingkhong, presents a portrait of a well developed state structure in the eighth century. His kingdom came into contact with the Shans of the kingdom of Pong in Upper Burma. Samlung, a prince and a brother of

the Pong king Sukhampha, visited Manipur valley and stayed for ten years at a place which came to be called Pong Inghol (homestead of the Pong) on bank of the Iril river in Manipur. The contact with the Shans was a significant development in the expanding relations of the Meitei kings with a foreign country, namely, the kingdom of Pong in Upper Burma. Naothingkhong married a Bengali princess, named Chingngurembi, who was said be a princess from the west.*

*'West' occurs frequently in the literary sources and historical writings on pre-colonial Manipur in connection with migrations as well as political and commercial contacts. The Brahmins, Bisnupriyas and the Pangans immigrated into Manipur from that direction. The holy men and the *Vaisnava* preachers also came from the West. The territory immediately on the west of Manipur is the Cachar plains or the modern Barak Valley of Assam. In the later part of the British rule, the two districts in the area, namely, Cachar and Sylhet, formed the Surma Valley Division under a Commissioner. These two districts were transferred from the Dacca Division of Bengal to Assam in 1874 when Assam was constituted into a province under a Chief Commissioner. Cachar district then included the present North Cachar Hills district. R.B. Pamberton in his Report of 1835 mentioned about the Jiri route through which migrations and trade took place between Cachar and Manipur since early times. Since the British time, 'Cachar Road' is the highway between the two. In the medieval period, the Cachar plains and the North Cachar Hills together made the Heramba Kingdom. The *Cheitharol Kumbaba* mentions of the relations between the rulers of Manipur and Heramba. It appears that at some point of time in the medieval period the boundary of Tripura Kingdom extended up to the borders of Manipur. An Assamese *Buranji* of the Ahom time, called *Tripura Buranji*, mentions a big market at a place called Rungrang where the people of Manipur, Heramba and Tripura regularly traded. However, the Cachar-Sylhet region is historically a part of ancient Bengal which consisted of the sub-regions like Radha, Gauda, Pundravardhana, Vanga, Herikela, Samatata, etc. from time to time. Srihatta, or the Cachar-Sylhet area, seems to have been generally a part of Harikela as attributed by the literary and numismatic sources.

(Contd...)

The *Naothingkhong Phambal Khaba* also recorded some interesting information on the agricultural development in Manipur. It is said that the people belonging to the Ningthouja, Khuman and Luwang clans were devoted to wet rice cultivation. The hill tribes, like the Shelloi Langmais, among whom Naothingkhong took shelter and married a

(Contd...)

According to two Panchakhanda inscriptions, dated to c. 5th century AD and 12th century AD respectively, the Tripuri king Adidharma-pha granted land to some Brahmins in Sylhet. The Tipperah Copper-plate inscription of 7th century AD mentions the grant of land by Samanta ruler Lokanatha of Samatata for a temple and for the settlement of Brahmins in Jayatungavarsa, which has been identified with the Jatinga valley of Cachar-North Cachar area. According to the Nidhanpur Copper-plates of 7th century AD, King Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa granted land to some Brahmins in the Chandrapuri *Visaya*, which is identified with western Sylhet. The Paschimbhag Copper-plate of 10th century AD recorded the grant of land to four *mathas* in Chandrapura *Visaya* within Srihatta-*mandala* of the Pundravardhana-*bhukti* by Sricandra who was the king of Vanga-Harikela. Finally, there are two Bhatara Copper-plate inscription of the 11th-12th century AD which recorded the existence of the sovereign Srihatta Kingdom (Srihattarajya) that included Cachar, Sylhet and the adjoining areas. The area, therefore, formed part of the different kingdoms that came into existence in eastern regions of Bengal in different times. The parts of Srihatta also later on came to be known under different names. Nonetheless, the people in the Cachar-Sylhet area do share a common geographical space and a common dialect and culture. Barrie M. Morrison in his *Political Centres and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal* (New York, 1976; Indian Reprint, Rawat Publishing House, Delhi, 1980, p. 9) called this division 'Sylhet Basin' and described it as one of the five cultural regions of Bengal. Geographically, it forms the north-eastern corner of the Bengal Delta. Therefore, some scholars refer to this division as Northeast Bengal. This Northeast Bengal or Sylhet Basin is situated immediately on the west of Manipur. For details see J. B. Bhattacharjee, "The Ancient Political Structure of Barak Valley", *The NEHU Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, vol. X, no. 2, April-June 1992, pp. 1-38.

tribal girl named Petangba, practiced shifting cultivation or *pamlou*. There were plentiful harvests in the kingdom. The historical text also gives the impression that there was a surplus in the production of food grains. Fishing was another means of livelihood for many. There were conflicts and quarrels over the exercise of fishing rights in the streams and rivers.

The state machinery had considerably been developed in the mean time. The coronation ceremony, the gorgeous coronation costumes and participation of the members of the royalty and nobility in the ceremony, as known from *Naothingkhong Phambal Khaba*, show that there was an elaborate administrative hierarchy and rituals which were the symbols of a developed state. The military system was well organized. It consisted of cavalry, foot soldiers and riverine navy. The weapons were sword, spear and shield. The *Lallup* system was also mentioned, but it seems to have been in a rudimentary stage.²⁴

Loiyamba Shilyen (Shinyen): The first written constitution

Naothingkhong's great initiatives in state-building were carried further by his successors. However, the Meitei State attained a more consolidated status, two hundred years after Naothingkhong, under King Loiyamba. In fact, Loiyamba (1094-1122 AD) was a remarkable Meitei king. The formation of the Meitei state was almost completed during his reign. In 1110 AD, he issued a royal edict, popularly called *Loiyamba Shilyen*, which is believed to be the first written constitution in the history of Manipur. It deals with the working of the Meitei monarchy, privileges of the royalty and nobility, working of the different administrative departments, functions of the various state officials, and the distribution of economic occupations and functions to different social groups or lineages among the subjects, the maintenance of

the abodes of the deities, functions and duties of the priestly class, etc. In short, it gives a picture of a fully developed Meitei state system. The royal chronicle, *Cheitharol Kumbaba* refers to the creation of six administrative divisions during the reign of Loiyamba, which were the precursors of the *Pana* system of district administration. The six administrative divisions created by Loiyamba were Khongchalup, Khogbilup, Angoubalup, Nongmailup, Khurailup and Khongjenglup. The *Loiyamba Shilyen* also mentions four *panas*.²⁵

Lallup System

The royal chronicle, *Cheitharol Kumbaba* mentions the existence of the *Lallup* system for the first time during the reign of Loiyamba. This *Lallup* was the compulsory feudal service rendered to the state by the male subjects between the age of 16 and 60 years. Under this system each able bodied male subject had to render to the state labour for ten days out of each forty days. The *Lallup* covered both military and non-military development works. The word *Lallup* literally means 'war organization'. Perhaps, it was originally a military service which was gradually extended to non-military activities of the state. The development of the elaborate *Lallup* system was the manifestation of the emergence of feudalism in the social, political and administrative structure of the Meitei Kingdom.

The *Loiyamba Shilyen* projected a well organized state, society and economy in Manipur. The agrarian economy was supplemented by the growing cottage industries – handloom and handicrafts. It was so extensive that the state had to regulate these activities. The edict also shows the presence of the artisan class. The monarchy was fully entrenched in the life of the subjects and the king was becoming very powerful. The nobility was strengthened over the years and the hierarchy of the nobility was formalized. The court etiquette had become very elaborate. The edict mentions the duties

and functions of the king and the members of the royal family. The duty of the priestly class was also regulated by the state. The king assumed the social and religious stewardship over and above his royal functions. The state is projected as the regulator of the economy in which the *Lallup* system played the role of the facilitator.²⁶

Emergence of the Nation-State

Almost four centuries after King Loiyamba, the Meitei state under King Kyamba (1467-1506 AD) attained the status of a nation-state. The power of the Meitei state was reflected in the military aggrandizement and territorial expansion. The entire valley of Manipur, covering all the erstwhile regional principalities, was brought under the direct rule of the Ningthouja dynasty. The Khuman and the Moirang principalities offered resistance to the Ningthouja expansionism for a long time. However, the Khuman autonomy could not survive for long and in the fourteenth century the principality was absorbed in the Meitei state. Moirang maintained its independence for many centuries. The rulers of Moirang could do so due to the resources available in the neighbouring hills and their control over the Loktak lake. Nonetheless, King Ningthoukhomba (1432-1467 AD) defeated the Moirangs in the fifteenth century and forced them to accept the suzerainty of the Ningthoujas. This principality was also eventually absorbed in the Meitei state. The hill tribes in the foothills were gradually brought under control. Finally, the Meitei kings established their political control over the chiefs in the hill areas between Manipur valley and Kabaw valley, though they did not directly rule in the hills.

The most significant achievement of King Kyamba was the conquest of Kabaw (Kabo) valley. Kyamba made a joint military expedition in the Chindwin basin in Upper Burma along with King Khekhomba of the Mau Shan Kingdom of

Pong. The two kings made conquests in two banks of the Chindwin river. Kyamba conquered Kabaw valley and several other principalities in the west bank of the river, while Khekhomba conquered the territories to the east of the Chindwin. The *Pong Meitei Lamyen Lairik* (Treaty fixing the boundary between Meitei and Pong) is an account of the treaty made between King Kyamba of Manipur and King Khekhomba of Pong. This was an agreement made between the two kings to the effect that the Kabaw valley in the west of Chindwin was given to Kyamba. This treaty between the two independent states (Manipur and Pong) was the confirmation of the conquest of territories by a Meitei King outside Manipur and the recognition of the international entity of the Meitei state by a powerful king of Upper Burma in the fifteenth century. The *Cheitharol Kumbaba* also recorded the event. It further mentioned that King Kyamba introduced some internal reforms in Manipur after his return from Burma. Of these reforms, most important was the streamlining of the *Pana* system. He established two new *Panas* – Ahallup and Naharup. It is conjectured that the *Pana* is a Shan word. However, *Loiyamba Shilyen* had earlier mentioned the existence of some *Panas* during the reign of King Loiyamba.²⁷

Chronicle and Calender

Kyamba introduced the practice of recording the royal chronicle, known as the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, and the *Cheithaba* system of counting years from 1485 AD. The peaceful reign of Kyamba at home witnessed the expansion of the territory of Manipur, and the incorporation of the Kabaw valley and the Shan population of the valley to the population of Manipur. The kingdom attracted immigrants from mainland India, particularly the Brahmins and the Muslims.²⁸

Resume

The evolution of the Meitei state over a long period of

about one thousand five hundred years (first to fifteenth century AD) is the story of the formation of a pristine (primary) state. The Meiteis were organized by King Pakhangba into a single society in the first century AD and this society became a nationality by the time King Kyamba reigned in the state in the fifteenth century AD. The Meitei language was the symbol of the Meitei nationality and on the basis of its unilingual character the Meitei kingdom became a nation state. Meitei was the nation, and the state was called Kangleipak which was renamed as Manipur in the eighteenth century AD.

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