

History of Manipur

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border hills not only make it hilled all round but shoot out offshoots inwards. They form themselves into manifold ranges and run far into the interior till they cover eleven-twelfths of the whole extent of its surface and leave only a strip of land for a valley to lie lengthwise from north to south. This valley which is the metropolis was quite safe and secure from foreign inroads as the approaches hereto were only through glens and defiles whereon none but glendoveers could pace firm and secure. So, it had the opportunity to grow in power, make it felt far and wide and shine in full sovereign splendour from the earliest times until recently time wrought a change in its fortune and doomed it to lose its sovereignty in 1891 (at the hands of the British at the battle of Khomjom popularly known as the Manipur Trouble) and form consequently a part of Indian India of the British regime.

This tract lies at a cross-road. Every downrush of races from the north towards Indo-China and India in early times used to leave in this soil a remnant each. So did every onrush of people from India and outside towards Indo-China and Indonesia. Every uprush of humanities from Indonesia towards India followed suit. So, the land became, at the dawn of history, nay before its dawning, the homeland of several races whether akin or alien. In other words, batches or several peoples from different stocks of humanity loitered in their early movements to settle here in this soil. Some of them preferred the hills to the valley and lived isolated lives rearing, of course, with a jealous care, their respective tradition in its full primitive splendour and left the present tribals to represent them in the modern world. Of the rest, those who occupied the prime of the valley, had to enter into an agelong struggle against one another for self-preservation. Absorption of the weaker by the stronger went on in consequence for a long time. Only seven strongest powers, namely, the Ningthoujas, the Angoms, the Luwangs, the Khumans, the Moirangs, the Khaba-Nganbas and the Chengleis, who were already hybrids, survived only to interbreed themselves into ever the more a hybrid nationality in the so called Meiteis, the three-fold aspects of whose national life forms the main theme of the country's history.

This valley had the fortune to cradle saintly lives like Mangang Guru Punsiba, Luwang Guru Punsiba and Khuman

Guru Punsiba whose halo used to illumine man in the domain of knowledge. So, it had the good luck to nurse its own children, the Meiteis, to whom knowledge was never niggardly in unrolling its ample page rich with the spoils of time, into a finest people and nurture so, a civilisation of a high order as the Cretan soil or a Grecian land had the fortune to do. It had also the good luck to fondle in its lap many a wise pen to record all its activities on the barks of Aguru. But very unfortunately for it, none came forward to play the role of a Thucydides or of a Herodotus and wreath them neatly into a history and make a present of it to the world. Nonetheless, its two contributions to the world, namely, Manipuri polo and Manipuri dance, which are ever fresh and new in all the ages, bespeak how elevated its culture was and how high an order of civilisation it had.

Many a history has now been written. But none is so authentic as it seems. The reason is, of course, not far to seek. Manipur was absolute all through its past. Its society evolved on in its own course or got revolutionised in its own way. So did its religion. And its government followed suit. Neither India nor Burma had much direct influence thereon, but for a tint from time to time. Its history flowed on in its own course with little disturbance from without until as late as the eighteenth century when several cults of Neo-Vaishnavism flowed into this soil and wrought the present-day Manipur. Its activities and its achievements are all recorded in its own scripts unintelligible to the world. So the writers however profound scholars they may be, had to work at a forfeit, no less considerable since the building of a history of Manipur must needs call for a study of some of them at least. So, their works turn unauthentic. Some indigenous scholars also have produced some works. But they are students more of Purana than of history. So their works fall more in the category of Purana than that of history. So is the case, this country badly needs an authentic history of its own.

Prof. Jyotirmoy Roy has made a very nice contribution and produced a full history of Manipur on a scientific basis however in a nutshell it may be, in this history of his, namely, 'History of Manipur'. It is, so to say, the first book that has ever compiled the three periods of the history of Manipur. He has made

a step, nay, a stride forward from his predecessors. Somewhat scanty as it is in the first two periods as facts can hardly be gleaned from scripts other than the indigenous chronicles, he has done full justice to the last and made it a documentary one. A student of history is he. His is to teach history. His is to study history. Why should not his history be a genuine one ! His profound study, his untiring labour and his unfailing perseverance are vividly discernible in every page of it. It is a precious gift to the land and an eye-opener to those who are interested in making a research in respect of Manipur and its people.

I thank Prof. Roy and that from the very core of my heart, for the honour done to me in asking me write a word or two in this valuable work of his. Further, I shall remain ever indebted to him for his best regards for me as a friend of his.

D. M. College,
Imphal, Manipur
29.4.58

A. MINAKETAN SINGH

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

THE first edition of my 'History of Manipur' was published in 1958. The book earned favourable reviews from the Press—*The Manipur Times, The Statesman, The Hindusthad Standard, The Hindu, The Calcutta Review and the American Anthropologist* and aroused keen interest among the readers. As a result all the copies of the first edition were sold out within a short period. Meanwhile the study of the history of Manipur has gained considerable importance. The Jawaharlal Nehru University (J. N. U) Centre at Imphal has included history of Manipur in its syllabus for the Post Graduate studies in History.

In the first edition of my book I attempted to reconstruct the skeleton of the political history of Manipur up to the period of Independence in 1947. But since then down to 1972 many important changes have taken place. Manipur is now a full-fledged state within the Indian Union. Manipuri language is recognised by the Shahitya Academy and Manipur literature is being taught up to the Post Graduate level. Big industries based on agriculture, Hydro-electric and irrigation projects are also coming up. These again are having great impact on the economy and society of the land. Rapid changes in the socio-economic patterns are noticeable in the hills also. Indeed, the life in Manipur today is not the same as it was found by Johnstone or Hodson.

In view of all these changes which have taken place in Manipur since 1947, I sincerely felt that time has come to bring out an up-to-date edition of the History of Manipur. The result is this Second edition of the History of Manipur. Besides incorporating some new facts here and there and giving a brief history of the Manipuri literature and the progress in education in Manipur I have retained in the second edition all the chapters of the first edition. Over and above, two new chapters "From Integration to Statehood" and "The Sons of the Hills" have been added to this volume. In preparing the history of Manipuri literature I took the help of Shri Ch. Manihar Singh, Head of the Department of Manipuri, D. M. College and Shri E. Dinamani Singh of the same Department. The materials

for writing 'The Sons of the Hills' have been collected from a paper read by Shri G. Kabui, Associate Professor of History, J. N. University Centre, Imphal. The cover jacket has been designed by Shri Th. Tombi Singh, Lecturer, Imphal College. The two maps included in this book have been drawn by Md. S. A. Ansari, Head of the Department of Geography, D. M. College, Imphal. In the preparation of the manuscript I consulted now and then Shri B. R. Sengupta, Associate Professor J. N. University Centre, Imphal and received his valuable advice. I am indebted to each of them for their kind co-operation.

In bringing out the second edition of the History of Manipur I was greatly encouraged by Prof. G. Kabui without which the book would not have been revised and published. I am also grateful to my esteemed friend Shri A. Minaketan Singh, Associate Prof. and Head of the Department of Manipuri, J. N. University Centre, Imphal, who has favoured me by writing the "Foreword".

I am also indebted to Shri M. Tarachand Singh, Mr. Peter and Shri Haripada Chakraborty for typing out the manuscript without accepting any remuneration. For arranging the publication of this book I am thankful to my respected uncle Shri Nalini Kanta Bhattacharjee. Shri Subhash Chakraborty, Lecturer, P.G. B.T. College, Imphal took keen interest in the publication of the book by watching the progress in printing from the beginning to the end.

Lastly, I am thankful to my publisher who readily accepted the responsibility in publishing the book and has brought it out within a reasonable time.

Since the book was printed in Calcutta it was not possible for me, living at Imphal, to correct the proof myself. Hence, here and there some mistakes in printing have crept in the text for which I apologise to the readers.

June 4, 1973
D. M. College,
Imphal, Manipur

JOYTIRMOY ROY

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

WHEN I came to Manipur in 1951, as a lecturer in history in the D. M. College, I felt naturally interested in the history of the people of this land having a rich cultural heritage and a long political tradition. To my great disappointment I could find no book on the subject and learnt that so far no attempt has been made in that direction. I consulted many important persons about the prospects of making an attempt to reconstruct the history of Manipur. Among those who encouraged me in writing a history of Manipur, the names of Shri A. C. Guha, ex-Minister of State, Union Government and Shri Dwijamani Dev Sharma, Chairman Territorial Council, Manipur deserve special mention.

There had been masses of materials for writing history but most of them were destroyed during the successive wars. Even of those left after the wars many are untraceable today due to lack of organised and systematic efforts to trace and preserve them: I gradually realised the difficulty in writing the history of Manipur. Yet, I did not give up the attempt. My single-handed effort in this respect is bound to produce a very inadequate result. In the search for materials I could not get co-operation from many whom I considered resourceful. In spite of it I shall be ungrateful if I do not mention the names of Pandit Raj Shri Atombapu Sharma, Vidya Ratna ; Shri R. K. Sanahal Singh ; Shri W. Tomcha Singh, Shri N. Nilkamal Singh, Asst. Secretary, Manipur Administration ; Shri N. B. Sinha, Lecturer, D. M. College ; Dr D. B. Dev ; Shri A. Minaketan Singh, Lecturer, D. M. College and Shri R. K. Shitaljit Singh, Headmaster, Ramlal Pal High School, Imphal who helped me in various ways in the preparation of my manuscript.

Owing to my ignorance in the old Manipuri script, I could not handle materials written in archaic Manipuri connected with the early periods of the history of Manipur. Hence the chapters dealing with them cannot claim authenticity. These have been added to arouse interest of the scholars who might devote themselves to the study of the subject. I have tried to arrange the

materials in a systematic way from Gharib Niwaz onwards. Some of the Chapters (*IV, V, VI, VII, VIII*) of this book were published in the Calcutta Review.

In presenting facts and offering views, I have constantly placed before me the high ideal of historical truth. The work of the reconstructions of the history of a people cannot be done successfully within such a short period by single-handed effort. Hence it will not be legitimate to claim thoroughness or perfection in this volume. I shall consider my labour fruitful if my work succeeds in making others feel the importance of the history of Manipur and in drawing the attention of the competent scholars to throw more light on the subject.

The completion of this volume in the midst of multifarious distractions is a matter of great satisfaction to me. For my part I may humbly add that I shall always value reasoned criticism more than the unqualified praise of kind friends. I beg of my readers to give suggestions for improvement which will always receive my best attention.

D. M. College, Imphal
25.4.58

JYOTIRMOY ROY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

MANIPUR, a small state surrounded by ranges of hills, is one of the beauty spots on the earth and rightly called "The Jewel of India". Her velvety green fields, transparent lakes, zigzag streams and bracing climate induce a visitor to feel as if he is in Kashmir. The merit of Manipur does not lie in size and population. In these respects she is smaller than an average district. She has made her mark by her valuable contributions in the field of Indian dances. The game of polo is said to have been originated in this land. The civilization here is rural and the economic life of the people is not dominated by the capitalists. Agriculture and cottage industry are the main occupations of the majority. While the men work in the field women weave at home. The embroidery works of the Manipuri women are diverse and excellent. The Manipuris keep their houses, clothings and utensils very clean. The society here is very democratic and is not affected very much by caste system. The women enjoy a fair amount of freedom. They are very hard workers and share the burden of the family with the male members. The men have special aptitude for craftsmanship. The Manipuri literature is also growing very fast and at present in the Eastern India it occupies the third position, the first and second being Bengali and Assamese respectively. "Manipuri Brahmans have penetrated into Burma also, and they have been for the last few centuries important missionaries of the Sanskrit culture of India in South-Eastern Assam and Burma." Due to geographical isolation Manipur remained politically outside India. But this did not affect the flow of Indian culture in Manipur. The culture of modern Manipur is undoubtedly a part of Indian culture. But in this respect Manipur was not a blind imitator. Whatever she accepted, she did it in her own fashion. More-

over, she was not only a receiver but a giver also. She has her credit in dances and in polo games. Her Rasa Dance is of pan-Indian popularity now, through Rabindranath's Santiniketan School of the Dance, through the interpretations of masters of modern Indian dance like Uday Sankar and through performances in the cinema. Now by the political integration of Manipur with the Indian Union, the ties between Manipur and the rest of India have been further strengthened. The history of Manipur is now a part of Indian history. However small in size and population she may be, undoubtedly she stands on her own quality. Time has come when historians should pay their attention to the reconstruction of the history of Manipur.

THE LAND OF MANIPUR

In old days Manipur was known by the neighbouring states by different names given by them. In Rennell's Memoir and maps of India it is called "Mecklay". In the Narrative of Symes and in maps of that period Manipur is called "Cassy". To the Shans it was known as 'kase' and to the Burmese as Kathe, a corruption of the same word, the Ahoms called it Makeli and the Cacharies Magli, while the old Assamese name for it is Moglan¹. There are differences of opinion whether the name Manipur is associated with this land from very ancient time or in recent period. Whatever it may be, in view of the old manuscripts it can be safely asserted that the name Manipur of this land became popular only in the modern age.

The present Manipur State lies in longitude $94^{\circ} 47'$ East of Greenwich and Latitude $23^{\circ} 50'$ — $25^{\circ} 50'$ North covering an area of 8628 square miles. In ancient Manipuri literature it is found that the state had a larger area. In the east it touched the borders of China and Burma. Some portions of Modern Burma also then formed a part of Manipur. In the south it is said it had been extended up to the sea. In the north and in the north-east it extended upto the kingdoms of Hidimbapur and Moran respectively. Of the total area of modern Manipur the valley covers nearly 700 square miles, the rest is covered by hills. The Manipuri community lives only in the valley. The hill area is the abode of the Nagas and the Kukis.

According to the geologists Manipur, Cachar, Tripura, Garo Hills and a considerable portion of Bengal were under water. On the north-east of these submerged places there stood the hill ranges of Assam. At that time there was a great continent in the present Pacific Ocean. Owing to some cataclysmic change in the surface of the earth, the Pacific-continent went down the water and the submerged lands of Manipur, Cachar, Tripura, Garo hills and Bengal came above the sea-level as the water receded from those places. According to geological calculations this happened not long before 100 million years. The discovery of various fossils of marine fishes in those places have amply proved the above theory. Though the sea receded from that area the valley portion of Manipur remained under water for a long time.

The Manipuri Purans also refer to this fact. There, it is found that in the beginning everything was under water. Nine Laipumthou (gods) and seven Lainuras (goddesses) working together made 64 hillocks. Thus the earth was created. After that, one day Lord Shiva with his consort Parvati landed on the top of the Nongmaiging Hill to play Rasa Dance in the valley of Manipur. But it was still under water. Lord Shiva with his trident made a hole through the hills which formed an outlet for the excess water. Gradually according to the will of Lord Vishnu the beautiful valley of Manipur came out of the water.

THE MEITHEI COMMUNITY

According to Dr. S. K. Chatterjee "The Meitheis or Manipuris are the most advanced section of the Kuki Chin people". They have their kinsmen in Burma and appear to have settled in ancient time in Manipur and the Lushai Hill, as well as in the Chittagong hill tracts. These Indo-Mongoloids are known to the Assamese as Chins; and Kuki-chin has been adopted as a composite and inclusive name for them². T. C. Hodson is of opinion that the group name "Meithei has been derived from Mi=man and thei=separate. But Brian H. Hodgson in a foot-note to a contribution to the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1853 expressed the view that 'in the Moitay' of Manipur we have the combined appellations of the Siamese Tai and the Kochin Chinese 'Moy'. In other words, the Manipurian tribe,

called Cossiahs by the Bengalis belongs to the Moi section of the great tribe called Tai by themselves and Shanvel Syam by the Burmese the sectional name being also foreign and equivalent to the native"³. But in view of great Shan influence over the culture and politics of Manipur it is difficult especially on linguistic grounds, to group the Meitheis with the Tai races when the structure and vocabulary of the Meithei language alike agree with those of Tibeto-Burman races.

A small section of the Manipuris strongly believe that they are of western and Hindu descent. On linguistic and anthropometric grounds this idea is quite untenable.

The modern Manipuri race is a composite one, formed out of several tribes. The fertile valley of Manipur witnessed the invasions of different tribes from time immemorial. At different periods the Nagas, the Kukis, the Shans, the Chinese came and settled in this land and merged themselves into the Manipuri community. Some Aryan and Dravidian features are also found in them.

MANIPUR OF THE MAHABHARATA

The rulers of Manipur believed that they were the descendants of Arjuna, the third Pandava of the Mahabharata. The story of Arjuna's visit to Manipur and his marriage with princess Chitrangada is wellknown. Second time when he visited Manipur he was opposed and defeated by his own son Babhrubahan⁴. But there are differences of opinion whether Manipur referred to in the Mahabharata is identical with the present Manipur State. According to Wilson Manipur of the Mahabharata was situated by the side of the sea and that cannot be identified with the modern Manipur which is far away from the sea-coast. Shri Nagendra Nath Bose in his *Viswakosh* has located Manipur in Kalinga. Gait also subscribes to this view. Dr. Apte locates it in the north of Madura. But Padmanath Vidyavinode has tried to refute those views and established that Manipur of the Mahabharata is identical with the modern Manipur⁵. The Puranas of Manipur also trace the Royal lineage of Manipur from Babruvahana. But in this respect the Puranas cannot be relied much because they were very much influenced by the Brahmanical Purana stories⁶.

AGE OF THE CIVILIZATION

It may be difficult to tell the exact age of the Manipuri civilization. But, that it is an old one is indicated by many direct and indirect evidences. If Manipur of the Mahabharata be the same as Manipur of today then her civilization must have existed earlier than the 4th century B.C., when the Mahabharata was written. Col. Gerini in his Researches on Potemy's geography writes "According to Burmese Royal chronicles (Maharaja Vamsa) Dhajaraja, a king of Sakya race, settled at Manipur, about 550 B.C. and later on conquered, old or upper Pagan".

Harvey in his history of Burma says "upper Burma lay inaccessible, true, it was nearer to China which from the 2nd century B.C. used trade routes through Burma.... Two were along the Irrawaddy and Salween River, the third down the Chindwin River and through Manipur took Caravans a three months journey to Afganistan where the silks of China were exchanged for the gold of Europe." Sir A. Phayre describes the route thus—"The route by which Kshatriya princes arrived (in Burma) is indicated in the traditions as being through Manipur which lies with the basin of Irrawaddy"⁸. Among the coins collected in Manipur by W. Yumjao Singh four pieces belong to the second century A.D.⁹. The discovery of these coins also indicates that there were trade relations between Manipur and India even in that old period. Accounts of Hiuen Tsang and Kamekshya Tantra refer that Manipur was once a part of the kingdom of Kamarupa. Sir James Johnstone writes, "The early history of Manipur is lost in obscurity but there can be no doubt that it has existed as an independent kingdom from a very early period. In the days when the Indian branch of the Aryans was still in its progressive and colonizing stage this district was repeatedly passed over by one wave after another of invaders intent on penetrating into the remotest part of Burma".

RESEARCHES ON THE HISTORY OF MANIPUR

Like other branches of Indian history, the work in the reconstruction of the history of Manipur was begun first by the British Officers who came from time to time and served in Manipur. Capt. R. B. Pemberton, Joint-Commissioner in Manipur, may

be regarded as the pioneer in this field. His "Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India," 1835, is a mine of information about Manipur. He was followed by Lt. Col. Mc. Culloch. He came to Manipur as Assistant Political Agent in 1840, "he became Political Agent in 1845 and held that post, with a year's intermission, until 1867. In the long period of 27 years he acquired a most intimate knowledge of the State and its inhabitants; he married a Manipuri lady from the family of Raja Nar Singh.... He was a man of culture and literary activity....." He wrote "an account of the valley of Munnipore and of the hill tribes, with a comparative vocabulary of the Munnipore and other languages" and published it in 1859. Ever since its publication his work has been the chief authority on its subject¹⁰.

Mc. Culloch's successor Dr. R. Brown published his work "Statistical Account of Manipur" in 1874. Another contribution to the ethnography and history of the State was made by Mr. G. H. Damant of the Indian Civil Service whose papers were published in the journal of the Asiatic Society. He was greatly interested in the Archaic Literature of Manipur¹¹. Ethel St. Clair Grimwood, the wife of the Political Agent Mr. Grimwood, published her "My Three Years in Manipur" in 1891. It throws a flood of light upon the events leading to the tragedy of 1891. James Johnstone's work "My Experiences in Manipur and the Naga Hills" published in 1896 also serves many valuable facts about the history of Manipur.

Towards the close of the 19th century Nithor Nath Banerjee translated the Ningthourol or Meitei chronicles. Umesh Chandra Ghose also translated the same chronicle. T. C. Hodson in his work "The Meitheis," published in 1908 made much use of the translations¹².

In the field of archaeological studies W. Yumjao Singh made valuable contributions. For many years he carried on his investigations privately and brought to light many interesting relics relating to the past history of Manipur. In 1929 he got the permission to excavate at the old palace site at Shangaithen. Except some remains of pottery and a few other miscellaneous objects nothing of importance was found there. Since 1933-34 the state granted a small sum annually to carry on his researches. Another important excavation was made at Kameng, where some pottery of the 17th century and a few other articles were found.

Among his collections there are many coins, some inscriptions, manuscripts, terra-cotta plates, and cups and an image of Buddha, one 'Sharinda' and thirteen cannons. Coins are of different periods. Some of them belong to the second century A.D. A small Assamese silver coin identified as a coin of Pramatta Singh of Assam minted in 1751 A.D. was also found. Several inscriptions were found in the hills near the valley, and seven old copper plates together with fragments of others had been collected and deciphered. Some ancient manuscripts in archaic Manipuri and also some Shan, old Bengali, Sanskrit and Assamese manuscripts were found. Shan manuscripts have not yet been deciphered. Some fragments of potteries were recovered from the cantonment area and from the old palace site at Awang Potsangbam.

A stone image of Buddha without the head was also found in an old tank. A musical instrument (Sharavel in Manipuri, Sharinda in Bengali) was acquired. "It is said to have been made by Raja Modhuchandra in the 18th century who played it when in captivity as a hostage in Ava". 13 cannons were recovered from the Imphal river near the old palace. Writings on some of them have been deciphered. "One is of bell metal dated 1807 and the oldest is dated 1670 A.D. bearing the name of Udayaditya Singh of Assam¹³."

The manuscripts collected by W. Yumjao Singh consist of literary, historical, astronomical, astrological and miscellaneous other works of which mention may be made of Cheitharon Kumbaba, the Ningthourol Shingkak, the Poireiton Khunthokpa, Dharani Samhita, Srimat Bhagabat. "The Cheitharol Kumbaba or the royal chronicle has been the most valuable for historical investigations, as it professes to record all the important daily transactions and occurrences of the State.... By orders of Jai Singh this book was rewritten as the former copy was no more available then". "The Nigthourol Shingkak is a work written in the way of prediction. It professes to predict all important events that would happen from the time of Khagemba downward. It, therefore, professes to be a work of the early 17th century. It is an anonymous work, and in this book, we see for the first time Gharib Niwaz's having had some Naga connection in his childhood. It describes in the way of prediction—the part played by Gharib Newaz in the religious reform of his

time. Although the book is much antedated, yet there are grounds to believe that it must have been written by one of the old school courtiers of Gharib Niwaz."

"The Poireiton Khunthokpa is the most conspicuous one of all pre-Gharib Niwaz manuscripts. From a linguistic point of view it seems to be much earlier than any of the books that come under our review. Circumstantial and other incidental evidences would confirm that the book might have been of the time of the third century A.D. It describes the colonization of the valley by a band of people from the 'land of death' under Poireiton. They first established their colony near the Langol Hill.... Before the arrival of this colonizing party, the land was inhabited by some people who were no better than the beasts of the forests, who did not know even the use of fire or of any iron implement. It was this band of colonists from the land of death that brought civilization to this valley".

Dharani Samhita is a Sanskrit work written at the time of Gambhir Singh. It gives an account of the valley as well as its inhabitants.

Srimat Bhagabat is an Assamese translation from the Sanskrit. Probably it was brought by Jai Singh from the Court of Assam¹⁴.

After W. Yumjao Singh none has so far taken up the work of archaeological researches in Manipur. Due to lack of proper attention most of his findings are untraceable now.

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