

**MANIPUR:
PAST AND PRESENT**

Author's Name

MANIPUR PAST AND PRESENT

THE ORDEALS AND HERITAGE OF A CIVILISATION

Vol. II

(Philosophy, Culture and Literature)



Edited by

Naorem Sanajaoba



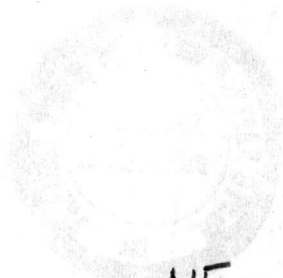
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To
The Architects of Civilization

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*A Homage to their Eminences—the
Great Meetei Literati Through
the Ages*

WANGKHEI PANDOL LAKPA
LEINUNG THARUK ASHEIBA*
KONDE KHUTCHAM MAI*
(of the 1st century AD)

ASHANGBAM LAIBA
KHARAM THADOI
(of the 5th century)

LUWANG KURU PUNSHIBA
(of the 6th century)

LAIKHURA TALIHA
NAMEIRAKPA KHULONG
(of the 13th century)

USHABA RAGHOB
NINGTHOUJAMBA
(of the 15th century)

AKANGJAM MUSHIN
KHAGEMBA APOI
LEISHANG KHOMA
NINGOMBA AKONG
YAMBEN PHOUGAK
THONGHI MAIBA

KAMENG PHADIBA
LAIRIK YENGBA NONGSHAMEI*
LAISHRABA TANU MUNSHIRA*
(of the 16th century)

LOUREMBAM KHONGNANGTHABA
(of the 17th century)

MOIRANG LALHAMBAM
SALAM SANA
KHAIDEM TEMBA
YUMNAM TOMBA
LANGOL LUKHOI
DWIJA SITA RAM
LAIRIK YENGBA HANJABA
ANGOM KABICHANDRA
alias Gopiram
(of the 18th century)

KHUMBONG CHANDRAMANI
PEBYA
MOIRANG YOIREN HANBA
JOGINDRA MAICHOU
KHUMUJAMBA
SHARANG PANDIT

CHANDRANU
 LONGJAMBA PASHURAM*
 MAYENGBAM BRINDAVAN*
 OINAM ANANDARAM PURNANANDA*
 WAHENGBAM MADHAVARAM*
 GOVINDA RAM*
 KHANGLENBA*
 LAIKHURA PANDIT
 WANGKHEI PANDIT
(of the 19th century)

MOIRANG PANDIT
 AMAKCHAMBA TOMBA
 MOIRANG THABAL
 TOKPIA GUNA

NAMEIRAKPA AMUKHOMBA
 TARPON
 KHUMMALLAMBA
 KHULEM PANDIT
 NAMEIRAKPAM DINACHANDRA
 MOIRANGTHEM CHANDRASING
(of the mid 20th century)

OTHER MEETEI SCHOLARS
 OF HIGH EMINENCE IN THE PAST

and

NAOREM AMUYAIMA
 KHUMALLAMBAM YAIMA
 OINAM BHOGESHWAR
 NINGTHOUKHONGJAM KHELCHANDRA*
et. al. among the living Meetei maichous.

*Indicates their eminences, who were not in the Royal order.

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Editor-cum-Organiser

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Introduction

CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Manipur was known by different names in the past by a number of countries. The early manuscripts and chronicles had recorded the names like *Poirei Meeteileipak* and *Kangleipak* among a host of others. The present name which had been given, a couple of centuries ago in the process of Sanskritization, did not find place in the ancient and medieval history. Meeteilogists widely believe that the present nomenclature of the state ought to be changed to the original name.

Despite the efforts of the protagonists of the above mentioned school to identify the present state with the 'Manipur', mentioned in the Mahabharata, their pious wishes had not yet been satisfactorily substantiated. Ardent protagonists of Sanskritization elsewhere had not conceded to the claim, made by Atombapu Sarma and his intellectual followers in the state. An enthusiastic leader of Aryanisation of all the diverse races in India, Ramesh Chandra Mazumdar failed to make a case out of the baseless claim. He remarked: 'As regards Manipur, its identification with the present state of Manipur has been rejected by many scholars'. (Expansion of Aryanism beyond Bengal, 1968).

The early geographical and political boundary had fluctuated considerably in a number of epochs. The present political boundary became a reality after making several compromises with Burma and Cachar, among others. Kabaw valley, which is nearly slightly less than half the size of the present state had been ceded to Burma, as a part of the appeasement policy by the British Government of India towards Burma; however, the provisions of the treaty had not completely foreclosed any possible reversion of the valley to Manipur. As things stand today, the possibility of reversion is positively very remote. However, the cultural frontier extends upto Burma, Bangladesh, Assam and Tripura.

The state with two millennia old socio-political organization is the homeland of the autochthones, the Meeteis, and twentynine ethnoses who have largely settled in the highlands.

The cultural achievements of the native peoples—in the valley or in the lake or on the highlands and hills through the ages may be attributed to all the natives notwithstanding the degree and quantum to the ethnic contributions. The settlements in the valley and the lake areas had however, given certain natural and physical advantages to the plains people in rendering more services towards the cultural enrichment of the state and conversely, the people in the hills had bravely encountered all disadvantages—natural or environmental or otherwise—in more than one sense.

In due course of time, Meeteis turned out to become the *Herrenvolk*—the mainstream people in the state. However, the *Herrenvolk* could not always dictate their terms to the autonomous administration in the hills, led by the village chiefs in the respective villages. Looking backwards, *Meeteileipak* evolved out of a confederacy of seven independent principalities, which merged in the pre-Christian era. Although a fair degree of homogeneity among the populace in the state had been reached centuries back, the land still nurtures a federalistic characteristic thereby showing adequate capability to assimilate settlers of the past within the cultural fold of the land. The historical fact of all the natives in the hills and the plains sharing a common destiny against innumerable odds and destructive forces through the ages, makes the changes possible in the framework of continuity. In the historical development of man and his society, certain developments and important events take place in places, where the capital is located, because the capitals happen to be the nucleus of trade, communication and other human activities; and the people having settlements in and around the capital appear normally as the dominating people. In the same way, the Meeteis who resisted all the intrusions and invasions from outside by making commendable sacrifices had more of the opportunity to overcome historical obstacles; it is natural therefore, that they turned out to be the *Herrenvolk*. The people of the land had developed their own culture and civilization, which are fairly advanced in terms of both material and spiritual attainments, comparable to those of other people elsewhere of that age and epoch.

The meanings and implications of the terms—‘culture’ and ‘civilization’—are so rich and abundant that nearly all types of human achievements come within their sweep. However, two disadvantages had appeared to be pricking the conscience of modern man. Firstly, there are some sections of the human species who still struggle to overcome primitivity. There are also peoples who always assume that their ethnic achievements only deserve the word ‘civilization’ and the rest of the world be downgraded to an inferior status. In extreme cases, this pattern of imagination leads nowhere but to the paradise of ethnocentrism of the Nazi brand. Secondly,

the objective achievements of man in different segments of time and ethno-territorial configurations are so diverse and distinct that the contributions of all the peoples appear to be specialised and pluralistic. Under these circumstances, where the human civilizations do not exactly follow a definite unilinear pattern, an attitude of mind bent towards laying down the verdict of superiority or inferiority of one culture to another, is unwarranted and prejudicial. Cultural relativism is a better approach than ethnocentrism; and it is remarkable that modern man looks beyond the symbols of race, colour or similar other variables. However, some of the civilized minds occasionally make room for traces of barbaric primitivism which smacks of ethnocentrism—a taboo of the modern civilization.

In a politically federal and culturally pluralistic multinational, multiracial and multiethnic country like India, the attributes of civilization had been, very unfortunately, monopolized by the Aryans exclusively. The basic tenet of federalism and pluralism is rendered preposterous the moment all the peoples and their achievements in history, are assumed nugatory and insignificant except that of one race or one colour or one ethnic group. This is what we call 'Fallacy that is India' or 'Indic Fallacy'. Colonial expeditions along with its spirit—the colonial attitude of mind—had been disproved by the global community following the decolonization movements on the global scale. Taking one page out of the holy book of the obscurantists and fundamentalists of all persuasions, R. C. Mazumdar presented himself as a forerunner of racialization of the country. He took two contradictory positions—the acceptance of non-Aryan civilizations in the country on the one hand and his procrustean zeal for Aryanization of India on the other.

In the first place, R. C. Mazumdar testified that different civilizations did exist. 'In his words: In the first place, there is no historical basis for the popular belief that the peoples of India had no culture worth the name until the Aryans came and civilized them. Both in the Punjab and Eastern India, as well as in other parts of this great sub-continent, many peoples are known to have possessed a highly developed material culture long before they came in contact with the Aryans, and this presupposes some degree of intellectual and moral attainments, though we do not yet possess sufficient materials for a proper estimates of these.' (Expansion of Aryanism, p. 50).

Romila Thapar also presented the ethnological landscape of the country: 'The ethnic composition of the people involved in these various cultures was not identical. Ethnological studies have revealed six main races in the Indian sub-continent. The earliest was apparently the Negrito and this was followed by the Proto-Australoid, the Mongoloid, the Mediterranean, and later those associated with Aryan culture. There is evidence of the Proto-Australoid, the Mediterranean, the Alpine, and the Mongoloid in the skeletal remains at Harappan site. . . The last to come were the people commonly referred to as the Aryans.'

(History of India, vol. I). The existence of advanced civilizations prior to the arrival of the Aryans and even after their settlement had been accepted by many historians. Nevertheless, pockets of primitivity too existed alongside.

After accepting the above facts of existence of parallel or multiple civilizations, R. C. Mazumdar proceeded with his fervent plea for Aryanisation of the rest of the people thereby exposing his contradictory attitude to the harmonious symbiosis of civilizations. He was not alone in this approach. In his words: 'The people of Free India must make a determined effort to resume the process of Aryanization and make it a complete success all over the country, not by force or compulsion, but by peaceful process, as in the days of the old.' (*ibid.* p. 51). The editor of the volume professes the view that Mongolodization of the Aryans or Dravidization of the Aryans or Aryanization of other cultures is not a sound proposition and mutual tolerance of the independent growth of civilizations deserves sufficient attention and notice of all the elites in the country or elsewhere. The days when the Chinese thought their place to be the centre of human civilization or the Western people claimed Mediterranean to be the centre of the world had passed by. There are as many centres of the world as one can imagine; but one need not be rigid in one's speculation for all time.

Had the people of the state or the early Meeteileibak succeeded in evolving a cultural system worth the name which is known as—civilization? This is the pertinent question. The achievements of the people starting from the obstacles of the stone age culture, reaching the stage of political organization of independent principalities, merging them into a confederate alliance and then moulding a compact homogenous nation-state in the pre- or early Christian era itself stand adequate testimony to the first requisite test of a civilization. The formation of the nation-state etc. had been given a complete treatment in volume I of the book under the same title. The administration of the nation-state was carried out under a prototype of constitution in the 429 A.D., which allocated the powers, obligations of the organs composing the state. The final written constitution came into force in 1110 A.D. in the form of an edict during the regime of King Loyumba; and the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 was in force till the merger of the state with the Indian union.

The material and cultural achievements of the people of the ancient state were carried out in an organised way following the lines defined by the prototype of constitution in 429 A.D. The development and use of metals, coins, and trade of silk, tea and other materials with other countries, the maintenance of a self-sufficient economy of that age and stage of human development, the evolution of statecraft, the power of organised and institutional defence against aggressions in the early history had been recorded in the one thousand and one Meetei manuscripts. These are not mean achievements of the people who organised a nation-

state in the South East Asian landscape. The minimal parameters of a civilization had been already found in the nation-state centuries ago. Unlike the successful Aryan dominance elsewhere, the streams of Aryans who were defeated in war were put to the services of the state and some of their values had already been assimilated by the nation-state and the people.

The evolution of the Meetei alphabet, literary achievements in the form of hundreds of early and medieval Meetei manuscripts—many of which were reconstructed after catastrophes and deliberate burning by an inordinately jealous preacher from Sylhet—the spiritual achievements through the egalitarian order of *Sanamahism* which do not permit casteism, infanticide, insubordination of women and killing of women, degradation of human beings in the name of the Almighty and priestly exploitation, glorification and deification of the *Maibas* or *Maibis* (priestly people), hereditary principles and holy wars, are no mean achievements of the nation-state in the past. The British reports published in the 19th century corroborated these facts. Strangely, some of the essential provisions of the universally enunciated Human Rights principles and laws had been found to bear close similarity with the Meetei social ethos regarding the capacity of individuals, privileges and powers of women, the interest of the child, the rights of the aliens, who are now absorbed in the Meetei cultural fold among others. The dreaded elements of fundamentalism and bugs of obscurantism are practically found missing in the *Sanamahism*—the traditional religion of the Meeteis. As the British reports had endorsed profusely, dreadful diseases, evils of human degradation and social stratification and dehumanising ethos had been imported through the human agents from the Hindostan of that age and the corroboration of this fact would be found in some of the articles in the present volume. In this context, the question of Aryanization is not the appropriate national scheme; but how the paradise was lost at the hands of the evil-minded aliens which deserve critical notice. As mentioned before, comparison of cultures and civilizations of man in different epochs and territorial configurations is fraught with many vices. However, the relative distance of the cultural systems of man from the universally enunciated global standards could be gauged in the hope that the distance could be narrowed down in the years to come and the message of oneness of mankind should not be lost in the thick myths. The cultural distance of the civilization of the state is juxtaposed cursorily with the universal enunciations of human rights in the context of cultural achievements.

THE GLOBAL YARDSTICK

Till date there is not a complete code of ideal human culture prescribed for man in all the continents and possessing such a code is not the crying need of this age and civilization. However, the international instruments of Human Rights enunciate certain standard for the protection and

safeguard of human dignity, liberty and rights, which in one sense, appear to be the preliminary cultural code of mankind. Salient features of the relevant provisions from the international instruments are cited herein.

The United Nations Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice, 1978 proclaimed an historic announcement with which the Meetei early beliefs coincide. Art. I. 'All human beings belong to a single species and are descended from a common stock. They are equal in dignity and rights and all form an integral part of humanity. . . .' It proclaimed: All peoples of the world possess equal faculties for attaining the highest level in intellectual, technical, social, economic, cultural and political development. . . . The differences between the achievements of the different peoples are entirely attributable to geographical, historical, political, economic, social and cultural factors.' The above declaration condemned racial myths the like of which are nurtured by ethnocentric peoples elsewhere: 'Any theory which involves the claim that racial or ethnic groups are inherently superior or inferior, thus implying that some would be entitled to domination or eliminate others, presumed to be inferior, or which bases value judgements on racial differentiation, has no scientific foundation and is contrary to the moral and ethical principles of humanity.' In fact, the myths of racial superiority are intellectual weapons of colonialists. As far as the editor of the volume understands, the early, medieval Meetei belief system and the scriptures did not contain these universally rejected ethnocentric norms, values and even the oral tradition or folk stories appeared to be free from these dehumanizing and poisonous notions. In case traces of such beliefs had been identified, they should be denounced as soon as they have been found out.

The above mentioned declaration, while placing the obligation to combat racism by way of prescribing de-racialising text books to students on the state concerned, and the obligation to infuse non-racist information to the masses on the media empire, is significant for fixing international responsibility on the state which does not promote the sacred objectives and provisions of the declaration. Article 9 proclaimed: 'Consequently any form of racial discrimination practised by a state constitutes a violation of international law giving rise to its international responsibility.' Happily, the cultural codes—unwritten or written—of the Meeteis conformed to this standard.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966 invites legal action against the authors of such literatures or beliefs: 'Art. 20 (1). Any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law; (2) Any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law'. Articles 25, 26 and 29 of the Constitution of India also prescribed freedom of religion and protection of the minority rights; however, as the trend shows the obscurantist and fundamentalists do not halt their colonial expeditions against the pluralistic and federal parameters of the Indian union. Even

morbid ethnocentrism appears to embark upon fresh colonial ventures at the fag end of the twentieth century and once again the Rome of universal brotherhood is threatened by the barbarians. The Nazi Frankenstein too grew and grew till the monster not only destroyed its own creator but also reduced the entire human civilization to ashes. History books, cultural works like the one in which the lines are scribed, should not be allowed to act as concealed weapons for taking the entire human kind to ransom and it is high time that the cultural historians would save the human species from the doomsday.

It had been found that many crimes, vices and poisoning of the human mind had been legitimately practised under the holy name of the Almighty and such traditions of primitivity and barbarianism are given unwarranted respectability. Although one hundred and one meanings of culture and civilizations could be advanced, the cynical meaning abundant with hatred, dehumanizing intentions had to be deligitimized by the civilized world. The Meetei cultural ethos has to be judged from this universal viewpoint. The UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1963 while proclaiming the discriminations of human beings as 'capable of disturbing peace and security among peoples', stated: 'All propaganda and organizations based on ideas or theories of the superiority of one race or group of persons of one colour or ethnic origin with a view to justifying or promoting racial discrimination in any form shall be severely condemned.' It is appropriate that the condemnations should reach to the vast ocean of humanity through the medium of textbooks, publications of other forms of print-media and also the mechanisms of mass communications like the radio, and the television among others. Culture of man should not mean degradation of all the rest of the human species. The declaration proclaimed that dissemination of such racial ideology through any channel of human information—possibly including religious preachings and oral traditions of the priests and demagogues—shall be banned and punished. To be fair to the declaration, it may be added that when the general masses participate in such crimes, it would be a difficult task for the state to bring them to book and therefore, mass education should be stressed upon.

Considering the provisions of the above mentioned UN Declarations and Covenant relating to Human Rights which lay down the pragmatic global standard for the cultural development of man in all the continents, it could be succinctly said that the Meetei belief system, the cultural code, the scriptures and the one thousand and one manuscripts touching upon more than a dozen major human faculties in the past, very nearly coincide with the universal principles. It is not impossible that certain traces of primitivity might have been incorporated in the cultural complex, but Meetei mind, trained on universal principles and oneness of the human race should be fairly broad enough to extricate or incise permanently any such traces if found at any stage.

Cultural relativism and Global standard of cultural systems definitely constitute the inalienable component of the ongoing human civilization and its ever enriching moral strength. The social progress and the technology that man had acquired should also be harnessed towards this end. The United Nations Declaration on Social Progress and Development, 1969 announced: 'Social progress and development shall be founded on respect for the dignity and value of the human person and shall ensure the promotion of human rights and social justice, which requires: (a) The immediate and final elimination of all forms of inequality, exploitation of people and individuals, colonialism and racism, including Nazism and *apartheid*, and all other policies and ideologies opposed to the purposes and principles of the United Nations; (b) The recognition and effective implementation of civil and political rights as well as of economic, social and cultural rights without any discrimination.

The message of today is not for Aryanization nor Mongoloidization nor Dravidization of other cultures, but it is to promote but international and mutual cultural co-operation. The UN Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Co-operation, 1966 proclaimed: 'Cultural co-operation is a right and a duty for all peoples and nations, which should share with one another their knowledge and skills'. The technology of man should also respond to such positive measures. The UN Declaration on the Use of Scientific and Technological Progress in the Interests of Peace and for the Benefit of Mankind also announced: 'All states shall take measures to ensure that scientific and technological achievements satisfy the material and spiritual needs for all sectors of the population'.

The historians had advanced theories like unilinear development of human history, the cyclical pattern of history and the dialectical unfolding of the human and the universal spirit and it is possible that more theories could also be in the foetal state. The human consciousness as it has progressed in the twentieth century invariably approves the oneness of human species, the common pool of human achievements in a number of disciplines and above all, the sharing of the common destiny of all lives in this planet. The cultural differences had also been given due respectability and even the advancement of the primitivity had become a liability of the entire human race. The ethno-territorial nation-states are instrumental in soliciting creativity and constructive competitions at many levels but not internecine hostility. Modern technology had eventually become a two edged weapon—capable of serving or severing the umbilical chord of progressive human civilization.

The present volume contains articles, contributed by the specialists on a number of cultural sub-areas and themes and it is believed that in its small way, the volume would enrich the knowledge about the human civilization. The terms 'Meetei' and 'Meitei' are same and both are in usage, however, the former is widely used.