

Manipur

THE JEWEL OF INDIA

Dr. S.C. Joshi



Not much of recorded history of Ancient Manipur is available. Since times immemorial, a developed civilization and ancient sovereign nation-state, Manipur was in existence. Manipur emerged as a State of Indian Union after India attained Independence.

Amidst the plenty of literature, this work is designed to present authoritative information on this easternmost state to highlight its past glories and the present state of affairs. Manipuri society is rapidly undergoing transformation. Ethnic clashes and identity crisis, unemployment, and other sociopolitical reasons are responsible for current turmoil in Manipur.

Organised in six chapters viz. Manipur: the jewel of India; History, people and places; Origin of the Manipuris; Splendours of Manipuri cultural heritage; Development efforts; and Social development and institutional support, this book will put new light on the State of Manipur and Manipuri society.

Students and researchers besides the policy planners and administrators will find this informative and useful.

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PREFACE

Not much of recorded history of Ancient Manipur is available. A great civilization and ancient sovereign nation-state, Manipur has been in existence since times immemorial. According to the historians, Pakhangba ascended the throne of one of the seven Main Principalities in 33 AD and founded a long dynasty which ruled Manipur till 1891. Manipur came under the British Rule in 1891 and later on it was merged in the Indian Union as part 'C' state on 15 October 1949. In 1950-51, an Advisory Form of Government was introduced. In 1957 this was replaced by a Territorial Council of 30 elected and two nominated members. Later in 1963, a Legislative Assembly of 30 elected and three nominated members was established under the Union Territories Act, 1963. The status of the Administrator was raised from Chief Commissioner to the status of Lt. Governor with effect from 19 December 1969. Manipur attained full-fledged statehood on 21 January 1972. A Legislative Assembly consisting of 60 elected members was established.

Geographically the State is divided into two tracts—the hills comprising of the five districts and the plains with three districts. Manipur is bounded by Upper Myanmar on east, the Chin Hills of Myanmar on south-east, Nagaland on the north, Assam on west and Mizoram on south and south west.

Important festivals of the State are *Dol-Jatra*, *Lai Haraoba*, *Heikru Hitongba*, *Rasa Leela*, *Cheiraoba*, *Ningol Chak-Kouba*, *Rath-Jatra*, *Kut*, *Lui-Nagai-Ni*, *Gang-Ngai*, *Idul-Fitre* and Christmas.

Agriculture and allied activities is the single largest source of livelihood of majority of rural masses and is also the mainstay of the State economy. From a modest beginning in 1946, the State has now got sufficient number of trained manpower of its own to implement

various schemes and programmes in agriculture. Production of rice has gone upto 2,864 kg per hectare for high yielding variety.

Total area under forest cover is 17,685 sq. km of which 1,463 fall under reserved forest, while 4,171 sq km is protected forest reserved and 12,051 sq km as unclassified forest. Manipur is abode of 'Shiroy Lily', the paradise flower which is not found elsewhere in the world. It is also the home of the brown-antlered deer, called Sangai one of the rarest species in the world.

Within a short period of one and a half decade of introduction of major and medium irrigation in the State, remarkable progress has been made bringing 59,100 hectare under the major and medium irrigation programme.

Power development began in Manipur with the installation of first hydro power house at Liemakhong in 1930 having two sets of 100 kw and 56 kw capacities. One thousand five hundred and ninety one villages, as per 1991 census have been electrified as on 31 March 1995. Power supply position in the State showed some improvement with the availability of the share of power from the central sector generating stations i.e. NHPC (Loktak) and NEEPCO.

No doubt, Manipur is industrially backward, primarily due to its locational disadvantages. However, it is now making rapid strides towards industrialisation. Manipur Drug and Pharmaceutical Limited, a joint sector project of Government of Manipur and Government of India through Hindustan Antibiotics Limited (HAL) Pune, has been commissioned at Nilakuthi in Imphal district since January 1993. Medium scale industrial units include a steel re-rolling mill, Manipur Electronics Development Corporation Limited, plywood factory, bamboo chipping unit at Jiribam, spinning mill, cycle corporation, cement plant, Shree Manipur Roller Flour Mill and Manipur Vanaspati & Allied Industries Limited, in the joint sector. A master plan for industrial development of Manipur upto 2000 AD has already been prepared through National Industrial Development Corporation (NIDC) and profile of 99 feasible industries in the State has also been compiled. The Centre for Electronic Design and Technology and Central Institute of Plastic Engineering and Technology have been established by the Government of India at Imphal to impart training in the field of electronics and plastic industries.

National Highways No. 39 and 53 pass through Manipur for a distance of 437.67 km. The State has 5,816 km of road both metalled and unmetalled as on 31 March 1993. The State is now included in the railway map of India with the opening of rail head at Jirribam in May 1990. Imphal is the only airport which is linked with other station in the region by Indian Airlines. The Indian Airlines flight connect Imphal to Dimapur/Silchar and Calcutta.

Bestowed with enriched natural piety, Moirang, Keibul Lamjao, Phubala, Sendra, Kaina, Waithou, Khongjom, Moreh, Ukhrul, Mao, Churachandpur, Tamenglong etc., are some important tourist centres in the Manipur.

This work is designed to present authoritative information on this easternmost state to highlight its past glories and the present stage. As the Manipuri society is also undergoing transformation in the present day time, unrest and disturbance is prevalent in Manipur. Ethnic clashes and identity crisis, unemployment, and other sociopolitical reasons are responsible for current turmoil in Manipur. This all is hampering the developmental activities. No doubt, ethnic identity, primitive social mores, traditions and cultural heritage of every social groups must be honoured, and maintained. So administrators and policy planners must keep this in mind while formulating or regulating a social order.

While compiling the manuscript, I have liberally drawn the material from different authoritative sources. Hence no claim of originality—except in presentation. I owe a deep sense of gratitude to various men of excellence, whose works and findings are consulted, cited or reproduced. At home, I am thankful to my wife and children who provided congenial atmosphere while working on this endeavour. I am also grateful to my siblings and parents for their moral support and inspiration. Last but not the least, I acknowledge my gratefulness to my colleagues and seniors for their cooperation, assistance and guidance.

The present endeavour will prove informative to researchers and policy planners with the hope of an advanced, prosperous and modern Manipur—keeping intact the pristine glory and cultural heritage having modern outlook.

1

MANIPUR: THE JEWEL OF INDIA

Described by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as “Jewel of India”, Manipur is a small North Eastern State of India, flanked in the North by Nagaland, in the South by Mizoram, in the East by Myanmar and in the West by Cachar District of Assam. Its total area is 22,327 sq. kms. and population according to 1991 Census is 18,37,149. It is surrounded by hills on all sides and there is a valley in the centre. The valley is only 20 per cent of the total area (5,561 sq. kms.), yet contains about 75 per cent of the total population. The nearest railway station is Manipur Road (Dimapur) which is about 220 kms. from Imphal, the Capital of Manipur, in the Central Valley. Manipur is not yet on the railway map of India, but National Highway No. 39 connects the State from Dimapur in Nagaland to Imphal and Tumu in Myanmar. A second National Highway No. 53 known as New Cachar Road connects Imphal with Silchar about 250 kms. away. Imphal is also connected by Air with Silchar, Guwahati and Calcutta. Manipur is renowned for its famous Dances, Siroy Lily, Sangai Deer, Lashingphee, Miroangphee and Phanek Designs of Handloom and Manipuri Dolls, besides being the exponent of the game of ‘Polo’.

It was the place where National Flag was first unfurled on Indian soil by Nétaji’s I.N.A. Manipur is also an ancient land of myths and legends. Chitrangada fought here with Arjuna and later became his consort. Perhaps nowhere else in India, women traditionally enjoy so much freedom as in Manipur.

PLACES OF INTEREST

Imphal-Shri GovindajeE Temple

A historic centre of Vaishnavites the temple adjoins the palace of the former rulers of Manipur. It is a simple, aesthetic structure with twin gold domes, a paved court and a large raised congregation hall. The Presiding deity is flanked by the shrines of Balaram and Krihsna on one side and to the priest.

Ima Market—Khwairamband Bazar

A unique all-women market. All the stall-holders in this market are women—almost 3000 “Imas” or mothers. It is split into two sections, one on either side of the road. Vegetables, fish, household utensils are sold on one side, and colourful handloom shawls and dress material on the other.

Shaheed Minar

The tall Minar at Bir Tikendrajit Park in the heart of the Capital commemorates the indomitable split of Manipur martyrs who sacrificed their lives while fighting with the British in 1891.

War Cemeteries

The British and Indian Army Cemeteries managed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, stand in memory of those who died in the Second World War. Serene and well-maintained, these cemeteries have little stone markers and bronze plaques recording the sacrifice of those gallant soldiers who fought to defeat their motherland.

Khonghampat Orchidarium

Covering an area of 200 acres, the Central Orchidarium at Khonghampat has a unique collection of over 120 different species of orchids, which included almost a dozen endemic species. This Orchidarium is located 12 kms. from Imphal along National Highway No. 39.

Manipur State Museum

The Museum, situated near the Imphal Polo Ground, is famous

for its portrait collection of Manipuri rulers, war implements, historical documents, variety of tribal costumes and relics.

Langthabal

Down the Indo-Burma road lies this small hill feature with the relics of an old, historical place, well-planned temples and ceremonial houses in the midst of pine and jack fruit trees planted symmetrically. Surrounded by the new Manipur University Campus, it is located about 8 kms. from Imphal.

Loktak Lake, Moirang

This town is one of the main seats of early Manipuri folk culture with the ancient temple of the pre Hindu deity Lord Thangjing, situated here. In the month of May men and women, dressed in colourful traditional costumes sing and dance in honour of the Lord at the Moirang “Lai Haraoba” which is a ritual dance festival held every year. The town also has a special place in the history of the Indian Freedom Struggle. It was at Moirang that the flag of the Indian National Army was first unfurled on April 12, 1944. The INA Museum containing letters, photographs, badges of ranks and other memorabilia reminds the visitor of the noble sacrifices made by the INA under the charismatic leadership of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. The largest fresh-water lake in the North-Eastern region, it resembles a miniature inland sea. From the Tourist Bungalow set atop Sendra Island, visitors get a birds’ eye view of the lake and life on it — small islands, its grassy margin, labyrinth of boat routes and colourful water plants. The Sendra Tourist Home with an attached cafeteria in the middle of the Lake is an ideal tourist spot.

Keibul Lamjao National Park

The only floating National Park in the world, it is situated on the fringes of the Loktak Lake. This is the last natural habitat of the marsh-dwelling “Sangai” browantlered deer of Manipur better known as the dancing deer (due to the fact that it has to balance itself on the unique floating wetlands).

Phubala

40 kms. south of Imphal lies this charming resort, on the western fringes of the Loktak Lake. It joins the mainland by a low causeway.

Other places of interest include Kaina, Khongjom, Moreh, Churachandpur and Ukhrul.

Geographical Profile

The State of Manipur is bounded on the north by Nagaland, on the south by Mizoram and Myanmar, on the east by Myanmar and on the West by Assam. The total geographical area of the state is 2,329 square kilometres. The oval shaped central plain has an area of about 1,765 square kilometres, and is centrally situated. Out of about 855 kilometres constituting the boundary of the state, approximately a length of 352 kilometres forms the international boundary with Myanmar.

Due to lack of detailed geological exploration in this area, our knowledge of its tectonic and geological history is inadequate. During the Archaean period, there extended on the north of Gondwana land, a sea, called the Tethys, covering approximately the present Indo-Gangetic plain, the Himalayas and its offshoots in Myanmar and the plain of Irrawaddi. This sea continued to receive sediments of conglomerates, shales, sandstones and limestones, eroded from the Archaean rocks, during the Palaeozoic and much of Mesozoic period.

This geological unit underwent an organic activity in the late Cretaceous or early Cenozoic which greatly altered the geographic and tectonic alignments of the region and established a new pattern of sedimentation. This orogeny was accompanied by extensive igneous activity. The Shan plateau was uplifted in the east and a narrow belt along the west, which marked the beginning of a tectonic highland of Arakan Yoma and Naga Hills. The tectonic highland created two large gulfs namely the Gulf of Assam and the Gulf of Burma, whereas deltas progressively fanned out to sea. The organic activity in the newly formed Arakan Yoma was very

pronounced during the mid-Miocene. A final organic phase in the early Pleistocene raised the Arakan Yoma almost to their present height and pushed the Burmese gulf further south.

In this region, rocks from upper Cretaceous to the present alluvium are found. The oldest rocks found in Manipur are confined to the eastern part of the state, close to Indo-Myanmar border. They are grouped as Cretaceous rocks, accompanied in many places by serpentine. The serpentine belt extended from the jade mines of northern Burma through Naga Hills and east Manipur hills into the Arakan region.

The Tertiary rocks which are found almost all over the state, range in age from Eocene to Pleistocene. The lowest Tertiary beds belong to Disang series. This series attains a very great thickness of almost unfossiliferous shales, slates, phillites, best exposed in Naga Hills and Manipur. It also contains beds of sandstones and quartzites.

There are two main relief features in Manipur namely mountain and plain. Mountains cover about ninety two per cent of the total geographical area of the state. They stretch northeast-southwest as parallel folds with altitudes varying between 2,500 feet (762 metres) to nearly 10,000 feet (3,048 metres), above sea level. They are part of Assam-Burma Tertiary ranges, which sweep in a long curve from the northeastern corner of Assam to Cape Negrais in Burma. In this state they enclose the central plain or the valley of Manipur. It is a small, high level plain, at an altitude of about 2,600 feet (792.4 metres), above sea level.

The whole of Assam-Arakan Tertiary belt has undergone strong folding, and long anticlinal axes can sometimes be followed for many miles, the more sharply folded ones are associated with thrust faults. Though some anticlinal crests remain at the surface, they have usually proved to have been removed by thrusting.

In the hills between Manipur valley and Cachar, folding is more dominant than faulting and asymmetrical anticlines are separated by broader synclines. The appearance of the mountain

belt is that of a succession of long parallel ranges separated by deep valleys, still further south, the whole belt gradually narrows forming the Arakan Yomas.

The mountain ranges have occasional connecting spurs and ridges of lower elevation between them. Their greatest altitude is attained in the North near Nagaland-Manipur border, close to Mao. The highest point in this tract is Mount Japvo in Nagaland, 9882 feet (3015.08 metres) above sea level. The Japvo range throws out numerous spurs towards the east and west. From this point southwards there is a steady decrease in the height of the hill ranges. Along the eastern part of Manipur through which runs the Indo-Myanmar border, there are series of ranges through which the rivers have, in places cut transverse valleys.

The central plain or the valley of Manipur is the most striking topographic feature in a mountainous state like Manipur. It is roughly oval in shape and irregular in outline. It is about 36 miles (57.92 kilometres) from north to south and about 20 miles (32.19 kilometres) from east to west where it is broadest. It is a flat plain surrounded by mountains. The plain extends right up to the foot of the bordering range where the slope abruptly changes. The plain slopes from north to south. The lowest part of the plain is occupied by the Loktak Lake. The plain, however, is dotted by a few hillocks.

The state lies in the catchment area of two river systems namely the Ganga-Brahmaputra and the Chindwin-Irrawaddi, the western half of the state falls in the catchment of the former and the remaining eastern half including the central plain lies in the catchment of the latter. In general the rivers occupy parallel valleys separated by parallel ranges except where they have cut transverse valleys. They carve out very narrow 'V' shaped valleys. It is only in some cases that the rivers have begun to develop flood plain. The Barak and its tributaries namely the Irang, the Makru, the Jiri etc., drain the western half of Manipur. The Manipur river and its tributaries, namely the Irill, the Thoubal, the Nambui etc., drain the central plain and part of the eastern hills of Manipur, and

discharge the water in Chindwin river of Myanmar. Many small rivers carry the drainage of the Indo-Burma border to Chindwin river.

Climate

The climate of Manipur is most enjoyable throughout the year. There are two seasons separated by two short transitions. From November to February is the period of winter season. The summer season commences in April and ends in September. The summer season is also the period of rains. The month of October is the period of transition between summer and winter, so also is the month of March, between winter and summer. The temperature in the central plain seldom touches freezing point, nor at any time of the year is it extremely hot. In hill areas it is much cooler due to the effect of altitude. The rains commence in April and continue upto September. Thus, there is considerable amount of premonsoon rain. The period from June to September accounts for a little over half of the annual rainfall. There is little rain in December and January. The rainfall in the state is high in quantity and is well distributed over both time and space.

Soils

The physical composition of soil is loose and porous, therefore, it does not hold water. On exposed hill slopes, the combination of tropical sun and torrential rains, has leached minerals from the soil. Only virgin soil is productive and virginity and productivity go together. Soils are generally lights, except in the river valleys where silt has accumulated. The perpetual burning in course of shifting cultivation (Jhoom), in some parts of the hills, has rendered the soil devoid of humus. The soils of the central plain are transported ones and contain high proportion of clay.

Forests

The state is fortunate in having luxuriant forest resources. The natural vegetation consists of grass, reeds, bamboo and tall trees. Under climatic and edaphic conditions of high temperature,

heavy rainfall, dissected topography and poor thin soil, natural vegetation has had almost a gregarious growth. Forests flourish from the foot to the crest of the hills. The total area of land under forest is 14365 square kilometres which is 64.25 per cent of the area of the state. The forests contain some of the very valuable trees including those of pine and teak.

Population

The total estimated population of Manipur, according to 2001 census is 25,69,000 and density of population is 107 per sq. km. Sex ratio is 978 females per thousand males. There are people of diverse ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious groups. This diversity is very striking in such an isolated state. The people of the state speak Kuki-Chin and Tibeto-Burman group of languages. The population consists predominantly of two groups, namely those living in the central plain and those in the hills. This has been the habitation pattern since pre-historic times. In the early days they were divided into groups and sub-groups and occupied various parts of the state. Those occupying the hills led a life of isolation. The environment provided very little mobility and consequently they developed into distinct ethnic groups. Of late, many hill people have accepted Christianity but some others still hold on to their ancient faith. Now they are reverting to ancient Meithei religion.

The striking features in the distribution of population are: The Meitei are the most dominant single group, constituting about two-third of the population of the state; they are concentrated in the central plain; in the hills they are conspicuous by their absence; the hill men are mostly scattered in the hills but they are not absent from the central plain; the Muslims inhabit the central plain as well as the plain portion of Jiribam together with the Meiteis; and the urban centre of Imphal has a small proportion of outsiders namely, Punjabis, Marwaris, Bengalis, Nepalis etc.

The existing roads of Manipur may be classified into metalled roads; unmetalled roads and cart tracks. Then there are footpaths and hill trails. The terrain of Manipur does not favour laying of

railway up to Imphal. The Government of Manipur, however is keen on getting a railhead in its own territory at Jiribam. For this, preliminary work has been taken up. It is expected that the railway line was to be extended from Silchar to Jiribam during the seventh Five-Year Plan.

One of the greatest problems in Manipur today, is that of a fast increasing population pressing on limited resources. Within the last two decades the population of the state has nearly doubled, without there being a corresponding increase in cultivable land or agricultural production. In an agrarian state like Manipur land is most significant of all the natural resources.

The largest part of the population directly depends on the exploitation of land. The per capita cultivable land is rapidly decreasing day by day, especially in the central plain. The situation in the hills is different. Each region, that is, the hill and plain, has its own peculiarities and, therefore, the problems have to be considered in relation to the local environments. An adequate food supply can be assured to the inhabitants only on the basis of maximum utilisation of the land available for cultivation.

The economic prosperity of the people depends, to a great extent, on agriculture. Agriculture is important not only for food crops and cash crops, but also for the employment it provides. Notwithstanding the type of employment it provides, permanent, seasonal and occasional, it continues to be the largest sector of employment. Thus, in 1971, about 67 per cent of the total working force was engaged in agriculture alone. This indicates a very heavy pressure and dependence of population on land. The agriculture of Manipur is crawling towards modernisation at a snail's pace. However, the state produces almost enough paddy, maize, pulses and other crops for its inhabitants. It has to be admitted that it is no longer a surplus state regarding foodgrains production.

A few years back much of rice and maize was supplied to other states. Now only maize is exported. The state has a large area under maize in the hills. Maize to a great extent is a commercial

crop for the hill men. But the yield per hectare is very low. In the case of most other crops including wheat and sugarcane in the valley, per hectare yields are lower than those of all-India and of other areas under similar agronomic conditions.

The state enjoys certain physical and climatic advantages conducive to the development of agriculture which are absent in the case of many other states. It has a fertile plain land; rainfall is abundant and almost well distributed for about eight months — April to October. Cultivators however, have to make optimum use of these natural advantages. The primitive method of cultivation, defective cropping pattern and low yield of crops, only reflect the backwardness of agriculture.

The agricultural operations are oriented to the seasonal rhythm. Much of the land under cultivation is cropped once only, during the summer monsoons. The fields, therefore are prepared in the early part of monsoon. The monsoon is early in the sense that there are pre-monsoon rains in April and May. The cultivator takes advantage of such rains and does part of his work then, to avoid strain afterwards. There is a labour shortage at the peak period of work, during the months of June and July. Most parts of India experience severe heat and drought during the months of April, May and part of June, which narrows down the working period for the cultivators in those parts. In this respect, the cultivators of Manipur are in an advantageous situation.

The small scale industries at present are lagging far behind as far as development is concerned. They, however, cover a wide range of activity, that of servicing as well as manufacturing of articles of day-to-day utility. The small scale industry stands next to handloom industry, as a source of employment, both full time and part time. They cover such activities as tailoring, carpentry, pottery, iron works, laundry, brick making, soap making, cane work, match making, shoe making repair of automobile etc. etc.

Recently medium and large scale industries have attracted the attention of the people as well as the State Government. The possibility of establishing a few such industries as cement, paper

and pulp, textile, sugar, plywood etc. cannot be ruled out. At present there is one sugar factory and one spinning mill.

Manipur has a great potential and possibility for tourist industry. But still untapped. This land of hills and dales abounding in beauty spots of tourist attraction deserves attention. Tourist industry if properly developed, will be a good source of income. As there are places of historical and geographical interest, tourist must be given adequate information as to what the state offers in amenities and attractions.

During the last few decades money spent on the Five-Year Plans is impressive but the growth rate is counter-balanced by the fast rate of population growth. For solving the various economic ills very careful planning is called for. All possible natural resources must be tapped without inhibition for increasing production and providing employment. An era of economic prosperity has to be ushered. The existing economic disparity between the hill and the plain has to be narrowed down. This calls for emphasis on and investment in the development of the hill areas. The present import of commodities should be gradually reduced by developing indigenous industries and helping modest ventures. The export of indigenous products like handloom cloths and silk fabrics, agricultural products like maize, ginger, chilly, timber, cardamom, cassia, bay leaf, turpentine etc. should be increased. The state should aim at self-sufficiency on the one hand and a balanced development on the other.

THE FLOOD PROBLEM

The central plain being an alluviad plain is very fertile and has a little more than one lakh hectares of cultivable land. However, parts of this plain are occupied by many small hill projecting above the plains. Also there are a number of lowlying areas called 'Pata' meaning swamps or marshes. The Loktak lake is a large sheet of water, which is more a swamp than a lake.

This plain is being drained by a number of streams namely Iril, Imphal, Thoubal, Nambol, Nambul, Khuga, Chakpi, Sekmai

etc. These streams have their sources in the high hills and come down to the plain from almost all directions discharging water in Manipur river. There is only one outlet, through the hills south of Loktak lake, through which the Manipur river carries the entire drainage of the plain. This outlet becomes too inadequate for the drainage of huge volumes of water brought down by so many hill streams during rainy season. A large part of the plain especially towards the south and the east gets impounded. This causes immense damage to the standing crops which is a recurrent phenomenon and needs permanent solution.

The factors causing floods, in general are: intensity of rainfall, flat type of terrain, soil erosion, deforestation, inadequacy of river channel, with the flow of rivers etc. All these factors have their own roles to play. It is worth-while to examine these factors in relation to occurrence of floods in the central plain of Manipur.

The rainfall pattern in north-east India is somewhat different from other parts in the sense that there are only three months, November to January when there is very little rain. The amount of rain for different stations is high and the number of rainy days comparatively more as will be clear from the following table.

Rainfall Amount and Number of Rainy Days

<i>Station</i>	<i>Normal rain in mm.</i>	<i>Number of rainy days</i>	<i>Heaviest Fall in 24 hours</i>
Dibrugarh	2759.4	131.7	223.5
Guwahati	1637.2	86.9	232.9
Shillong	2415.3	12.1	415.3
Cherrapunji	11418.7	157.1	973.8
Silchar	3225.4	135.0	290.3
Aijawl	2263.8	123.6	236.0
Imphal*	1435.8	94.8	122.4

Source: Meteorological Department, Climatological Tables of Observatories in India (Nasik, Meteorological Department, 1967), pp. 1-18 and pp. 329-30.

*Data for Imphal obtained from Regional Meteorology Centre, Calcutta, 1968.

There are premonsoon rains from March to early June. Rains are due to convection associated with thunder and lightning. "Before the formation of monsoon depression, the rain over Assam and over the Arakan Coast is locally heavy"². During south-west monsoon, depressions moving north eastwards cause heavy rain along the Arakans and the hill region comprising the north-eastern frontier of India.

The rainfall in the central plain of Manipur and in the hills is considerable in amount and is generally well distributed over both time and space. The normal rainfall in the valley is about 1435 mm. The amount of rainfall in respect of hill stations far exceeds that of the valley. The average rainfall for different hill stations is as follows:

Churachandpur 1760 mm, Ukhrul 1830 mm, Kangpokpi 4030 mm and Tamenglong 4245 mm.³ Tamenglong receives the highest amount of rainfall in the state. The highest recorded rainfall that occurred here during 24 hour was 236.5 mm (on April 26, 1934). As we do not have current hydrological data for the river basins of Manipur and our information about the volume and discharge of the main rivers draining the central plain is negligible.

It is to be noted that:

1. There is a belt of heavy rain in the northern part of the state wherein are situated Tamenglong, Kangokpi and Ukhrul.
2. Big rivers draining the central plain like Imphal, Iril, Thoubal etc. originate in the rainier region of the state.
3. The period of widespread heavy rain is June and July.
4. Rainfall sometimes is of short duration but quite heavy in amount as in localised thunderstorms.
5. Premonsoon rain sometimes is of high intensity (1965 flood occurred in the month of May).
6. The tail end of rainy season in October and early November sometimes too causes heavy rain resulting

in occasional floods, inundating the paddy crop otherwise ready for harvest (as in 1975).

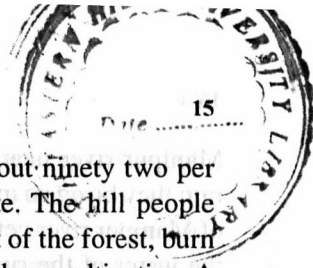
7. There are spells of break of rain in between the passage of two depressions sometimes lasting for days together.
8. The long-duration heavy rain is responsible for floods of damaging intensity.

Considering the occurrence of floods the whole rainy season may be divided into: (i) premonsoon (April-May), (ii) early monsoons (June-July), (iii) middle monsoon (August-September), and (iv) tail end of monsoons (October). Of these four subdivisions the middle monsoon is comparatively free from the danger of flood, whereas it is the early monsoon which causes flood situation in the central plain.

The rivers of the central plain occupy higher level than the surrounding land. They are kept contained within the natural levees which are further reinforced with earthwork in the form of embankments. In the flood-prone areas the bunds are raised 5 to 7 metres above the general level of the ground. When the water touches the danger level, the bunds are under constant vigil and the Department of Flood Control has to perform a very strenuous task. In normal rainfall there is no difficulty for the discharge of water through the rivers. The rivers passing through the central plain namely Iril, Imphal, Thoubal, Nambul etc. originate in the high hills full of steep slopes. In such catchment areas, the short-duration heavy rain flows downward with high velocity till the central plain is reached.

In the plain the velocity is abruptly slowed down. Thus, the river at the junction of hill and plain brings supply of water per second more than it can carry the same on a level land, in its winding course downstream. The winding course that the stream naturally follows in the flat plain only lengthens the channel, reduces the gradient and reduces the velocity.

The natural vegetation in the catchment area is greatly misused. About one third of the entire population of Manipur lives



MANIPUR: THE JEWEL OF INDIA

in the hills. The hills and mountains cover about ninety two per cent of the total geographical area of the state. The hill people depend on subsistence farming. They cut a part of the forest, burn the timber and cultivate the land. This is called jhum cultivation. A plot of land can hardly be cultivated for two to three years. Within this period the soil is washed down. The land has to be abandoned. A new path of the forest land has to be jhumed. Due to this the forest land which could have regulated the flow of rain water, goes on shrinking. According to Government Statistics about 50 to 60 thousand hectares of land is deforested annually⁵. If this process continues there will be no forests left in the state by the end of this century.

Forests are also depleted for fuel and timber both for domestic use and for sale. The central plain depends on the hills for firewood and timber. Due to growth of population forests are increasingly jhumed and abandoned. Consequently area under barren land is increasing. The rivers are charged with rock fragments, pebbles, sand and silt. The river beds in the central plain, as a result, are getting silted up and raised thus increasing the hazards of floods. Every year there are two to three floods of devastating intensity. This only proves the inadequacy of the river channels to cope with heavy rain.

The population in the central plain is rapidly increasing. It has doubled during the last twenty five years. People in a bid to increase the land under plough are encroaching upon the marginal land the hill slopes, the swamp the river banks etc. The settlements in general are on the levees and raised land not susceptible to floods. People are slowly moving towards river embankments for constructing houses. In this process of encroachment they narrow the legitimate channel of the river and interfere with the flow of river and in various other ways. As a result, the carrying capacity of the rivers is greatly reduced.

The role of two of the tributaries of Manipur river namely Khuga and Chakpi needs special mention. These streams join the

Manipur river near Shugnu—the end of the plain. During heavy rain they bring so much water and coarse sediments that the mouth of Manipur river gets choked temporarily and instead of advancing, the water of the river is impounded and a considerable area gets submerged. Because of which this part of the central plain is most susceptible to floods.

Among other areas susceptible to floods may be included the margins of Loktak Lake. When the mountain brooks discharge huge volume of water into the lake, it swells and submerges the marginal land. The water of the lake slowly passes through Kordak channel to the Manipur river. This channel is, however, a two-way drainage link. The Manipur river occupies a lower level than the lake, but when it inundates the surrounding area, the impounded water slowly rises and moves towards the lake through this very channel. In addition to this many lowlying areas like swamps and marshes, for lack of good drainage outlet too become huge sheets of water and inundate the peripheral land. There is the question of breach in embankments due to man's negligence or deliberate interference which can lead to flood almost anywhere in the southern and eastern part of the central plain.

To minimise the chances of floods, we may abstain from such activities that enhance the chances of flood. In the hills, the practice of jhuming and abandoning the land can be suitably modified by encouraging settled terrace cultivation. It is heartening to learn that Government of Manipur has introduced this scheme. The felling of trees for fuel can be minimised by making available alternate source of fuel, say hydroelectricity Kerosene or LPG. Some hydroelectric plants at suitable locations will go a long way in this regard. A few storage dams for the purpose of hydroelectricity and for irrigation and flood control can be constructed. This will provide cheap power in the hills and irrigation water for much needed double cropping in the central plain. A few schemes are already under way. In the central plain itself which bears the brunt of flood, a long term plan has to be undertaken. This should include: (i) blasting

of hard rock in the bed of Manipur river near Shugnu, as the bed of the river at any cost has to be deepened to increase its carrying capacity, (ii) the winding course of the river has to be shortened at suitable locations by digging new straight channels for quick disposal of drainage, and (iii) human interference with the natural flow of water should be minimised.

The occurrence and damaging effects of floods can be counteracted by taking precautionary measures. Such measures can include: (1) the replacement of jhuming by terracing, (2) protection of forest wealth, (3) planned afforestation, (4) regulating the flow of river by constructing dams, (5) straightening the river courses, (6) blasting of Shugnu Hump, and (7) collection of meteorological and hydrological data.

LIFE OF THE PEOPLE

Arts and Culture

Manipur is a mosaic of traditions and cultural patterns. In the field of art and culture, the State is best represented by its dance forms. The "Lai-Haraoba", a traditional stylised dance is a ritual dance performed for appeasing gods and goddesses. The Lai Haraoba festival is generally held between April and May, after the harvest season. The Raas songs and dances express the Leelas (sports) of Lord Krishna as a child with the Gopis (milkmaids) of Brindavan, and expresses their yearning for communion with the Lord. The Raas dances are essentially lyrical and have extremely graceful movements coupled with light steps, in which the heel practically never touches down. The tribal dances of Manipur are the expression of love, creativity and aestheticism of the tribesman's primitive way of life. Their festivals and rituals are occasions when their hopes and expressions of beauty and life are translated into eloquent, enchanting dance forms.

Handicrafts

Manipuri Krishna Radha Dolls in Raslila dance pose with traditional Krishna playing the flute and Radha in traditional dance

costume are prized souvenirs to the tourists. Phirooks—a decorative flower vase in papier mache, Isingsokpidenicting a Manipuri girl carrying water, also in papier mache, and Khamba Jagoi—a doll of a real life—like Khamba Dance with traditional dance dress are coveted by all for sheer artistry and skill in craftsmanship. Manipur's cane and bamboo products are also widely acclaimed. From beautiful Flower Basket, fine Murahs, Long up used in fishing, Long Kharai and Loo, also for fishing, Kangla Utra—a duplicate of the ancient palace gate of Manipur, Chengbol for keeping cloths, Likhai—a basket for measuring grains besides Bamboo Tray, Bamboo hat and many other utility products made of bamboo and cane are widely acclaimed. In Manipur, cane and bamboo are available in abundance and craftsmen are famous. Wood carvings of Saru Polan—a skeleton figure, Jewellery items like Marei Paneng, Heibi Mapal, Parijat Pareng, Kokhur Horobai, Khoimehum, Kyam Likphang, Tal, Khuji, Popchavbi and Chomlang are also fine specimens of artistry. Kouna Mat made of reeds, pottery works and stone works also find appreciation by the discerning public.

Poetic-Gesture

Manipur is a mosaic of traditions and cultural patterns. In the field of art and culture, the State is best represented by its classical and folk-dance forms. Raas Leela songs and dances depict the Leelas (Sports) of Lord Krishna as a child with the Gopis of Brindavan, and express their yearning for communion with the Lord. The Raas Dances are essentially lyrical and have extremely graceful movements. A spring festival, the "Lai-Haraoba" held in April and May is symbolised by a traditional, stylised and ritualistic dance performed for peace and prosperity. The Tribal folk dances of Manipur are an expression of nature, creativity and aestheticism of the tribal way of life.

A TRADITION OF INDIGENOUS GAMES

The tradition of sports dates back to the political history of Manipur—a history of small kingdoms which were in keen

competition with one another. Wars between Manipur and Burma resulted in a martial tradition, which in turn, gave due impetus to the promotion of sports.

“Sagol Kangjei” (Polo)-originated in Manipur. The game flourished during the reign of a long dynasty of Kings. The Manipuri Pony is the most versatile, swift and agile Polo pony in the world. It is still a popular game-international players participate in tournaments at Imphal. “Mukna Kangjei” (Wrestling - Hockey) is also a very popular game in Manipur. A player often encounters an opponent while attempting to carry or hit the ball towards the goal. This encounter develops into a trial of strength known as Mukna. “Yuni-Lakpi” (Rugby) is played, using a greesed coconut. The box area of the field which is beyond the goal line, is the centre of action. The players attempt to carry the coconut into the box and pass the goal line against the opponents.

A Heritage in Handlooms and Handicrafts

It is said that the goddess “Panthoibi” drew her inspiration for weaving from a spider making cobweb in a corner. While, almost every house-hold in Manipur owns a loom-women folk alone are the weavers. Intricate designs are woven on sarees, sarongs, shawls and bedspreads. The handloom industry is the largest cottage industry in Manipur, with the finished items often being exported.

Manipuri Pottery is crafted without a potter’s wheel. It is a rare experience to witness the potters of Andro, Thongjao and Nungbi deftly moulding an unbelievable range of earthenware. Beautiful pieces of art made out of cane and bamboo form an important part of handicrafts. Tourists can take home a Lifan, Phak (weed mats), Phiruk, Manipuri Dolls and a host of other beautiful carvings from rare and exotic varieties of timber.

Flora Exotica

Blessed with an amazing variety of flora and fauna, 67 % of the geographical area of Manipur is hill tract covered forests. Depending on the altitude of hill ranges, the forests range from

tropical to subalpine. The wet forests, the temperate forests and the pine forests occur between 900-2700 m above MSL and they together sustain a host of rare and endemic plant and animal life.

Coveted the world over as some of the most beautiful and precious blooms, orchids have an aura of the exotic, mysterious east about them. In Manipur, they abound in their natural habitat growing in soil or on trees and shrubs, spreading their beauty and colour, stunning the eye that is not used to seeing them in such abundance. There are 500 varieties of orchids which grow in Manipur of which 472 are already identified.

The Hoolock Gibbon, the Slow Loris, the Clouded Leopard, The Spotted Linshang, Mrs. Hume's Barbacked Pheasant, Blyths Tragopan, Burmese Pea-Fowl, four different species of Hornbills etc. form only a part of the rich natural heritage of Manipur. However, the most unique is the "Sangai" — the dancing deer. The floating mass of vegetation on the Loktak Lake sustains small herds of this endemic deer which unfortunately has the dubious distinction of being the most threatened cervid in the world.

Destinations Galore

Imphal the capital of Manipur Imphal is a bustling, minimetropol is situated at a height of 790 M above sea level. The following are some of the places to be visited.

1. Shree Govindajee Temple

A historic Vaishnavite centre, adjoining the Royal palace of Manipur's former Maharajas, the Govidjee temple is a simple yet beautiful structure. Twin domes, a paved courtyard, and a large raised congregation hall form a perfect backdrop for priests who descend the steps to accept offerings from devotees in the courtyard. The shrines of Krishna and Balaram and Jagannath flank the two sides of the presiding deity.

2. Khwairamband Bazar of Ima Market

A unique all women's market, having 3000 "Imas" or mothers who run the stalls, it is split into two sections on either side of a

road. Vegetables, fruits, fish and household groceries are sold on one side and exquisite handlooms and household tools on the other. Not far away is a street where beautiful wicker works and basketry are sold.

3. Shaheed Minar

The indomitable spirit of the Meitei and tribal martyrs who sacrificed their lives while fighting the British in 1891, is commemorated by this tall Minar at Bir Tikendrajit Park in the heart of Imphal.

4. War Cemeteries

Commemorating the memories of the British and Indian soldiers who died during the World War II, these cemeteries are managed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Serene and well maintained, the graves carry little stone markers and bronze plaques recording the sacrifice of those brave soldiers.

5. Khonghampat Orchidarium

12 kms. from Imphal on Highway No. 39 is the Central Orchidarium which covers 200 acres and houses over 120 rare varieties of orchids, which include almost a dozen endemic species. The peak blooming season is April-May.

6. Manipur Zoological Gardens

6 Kms to the west of Imphal, at the foot of the pine growing hillocks at Iroisemba on the Imphal-Kangchup Road are the Zoological Gardens. Not to be missed is an opportunity to see the graceful brow antlered deer (Sangai) one of the rarest species in the world, in sylvan surroundings.

7. Langthabal

8 Kms. down the Indo-Burma road lies this small hill feature with relics of an old, historic palace, temples of architectural importance and ceremonial houses. Set among symmetrically planted jackfruit and pine trees Langthabal offers a view of the Manipur University and some picturesque vistas.

8. Loktak Lake Complex - Moirang

45 kms. from Imphal, the town is one of the main centres of early Meitei folk culture with the ancient temple of the pre-Hindu deity Lord Tbangjing, situated here. In the month of May, men and women, dressed in colourful traditional costumes sing and dance in honour of the Lord at the Moirang "Lai Haraoba" which is a ritual dance festival held every year.

The town also has a special place in the history of the Indian Freedom Struggle. It was at Moirang that the flag of the Indian National Army was first unfurled on April 14, 1944. The INA Museum containing letters, photographs, badges of ranks and other memorabilia reminds the visitor of the noble sacrifices made by the INA under the charismatic leadership of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

9. Loktak Lake and Sendra Island

48 kms from Imphal, is the largest fresh-water lake in the North East region, a veritable miniature inland sea. From the Tourist Bungalow set atop Sendra Island, visitors get a birds eye view of life on the Lake—small islands that are actually floating weck on which live the Lake people, the shimmering blue waters of the Lake, labyrinthine boat routes and colourful water plants. The Sendra Tourist Home with an attached Cafeteria in the middle of the lake is an ideal tourist spot.

Keibul Lamjao National Park

The only floating national Park in the world, on the Loktak Lake is the last natural habitat of "Sangai"—the dancing deer of Manipur. A glimpse of the deer in this unique wetland ecosystem is a must for any wildlife enthusiast. Other wildlife viz.; Hog Deer, Otter and a host of water fowls and migratory birds can also be seen during November to March. The Forest Department maintains watch towers and two rest houses within the park.

Phubala

40 kms. from Imphal, on the western fringe of the Loktak

lake to the South of Imphal is a charming little resort, links to the mainland by a narrow causeway. Boating and other water sports are being introduced here.

Bishnupur

27 kms. from Imphal stands the single called conical roofed Vishnu temple, built in the 15th Century by King Kyamba. Besides its antiquity, the temple is famous for the Chinese influence on its architecture. Bishnupur is also renowned for its chiselled stoneware.

Other places of Tourist interest are the Kongjom War Memoria, Kaina Tourist Resort, Chura chandour, Ukhrul, Tengnoupal and Moreh on the Myanmar border. Adventure Tourism facilities are also being developed at the Manipur Mountaineering and Trekking Associations's (MMTA) Complex at Lamdan (Sudarshan Peak) near the Loktak Hydroelectric Power Project, the Manipur Adventure and Allied Sports Institute's (MAASI) complex at Keirao and at the Tourist Home located in the Shiroy Hills near Ukhrul District Headquarters. These Associations conduct training and treks for tourists with an adventurous streak. They also offer opportunities for jungle exploration, mountaineering, rock climbing and adventurue etc.

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