

UNQUIET VALLEY

N. Lokendra Singh

The early 20th century witnessed many forms of popular movements in India which made tremendous impacts on India's de-colonisation process. The history of India's north eastern region, particularly that of Manipur reveals many fascinating yet unexplored social movements of far reaching significance.

The present book is an attempt to examine the dynamics of colonial penetration towards north east and the subsequent transformation of the traditional socio-political order of the erstwhile border state after the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891. Based mainly on the archival materials, the work not only explores the process of social restructurisation but also examines the deeper socio-economic implications of the various anti-colonial and anti-feudal popular movements in Manipur Valley. While discussing the interplay of various social groups emphasis is given on an exploration of the social roots and political ideas of the Manipuri middle class.

The book will be of immense use to the students, researchers and teachers of modern history of India in general and north-east in particular.

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N. LOKENDRA SINGH (b. 1956) studied in St. Stephen's College and Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has been teaching Modern History in Manipur University since 1984.

He is keen observer of modern history of Manipur. He has already got published a book entitled *Manipur and Second World War*. He has written more than a dozen articles which have already been published in reputed journals.

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SOCIETY, ECONOMY AND POLITICS IN MANIPUR (1891-1950)



N. LOKENDRA SINGH



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PREFACE

The present State of Manipur, with an area of 8628 sq.miles, situated in the extreme north-eastern region bordering Burma, was merged into the Indian Union on 15th October, 1949. Earlier after its defeat in the Anglo-Manipur war of 1891 the status of the former sovereign state had been reduced to that of a Princely State, with 11 gun salute, under the British Paramountcy. Geo-topographically, Manipur is essentially a region with difficult hill ranges surrounding a very fertile valley of about 628 sq. miles. Due to such Geo-topographical factors the state was relatively unaffected by wider socio-economic, political and cultural cross currents; its interactions with other regions having been confined to that with the neighbouring areas of Cachar, Bengal, Tripura, Burma and the adjoining hills inhabited by different tribes.

The hills of the state are inhabited by 29 different tribes of the 'Naga' and the 'Kuki' groups, while the valley is inhabited by the 'Meiteis'. Because of difficult topography, underdeveloped means of transport and communication and primitive forms of tools and implements, the numerous tribes had taken relatively longer to grow out of their traditional socio-economic system. The numerous tribes had for long been maintaining communal ownership of land with *jhum* cultivation, hunting and fishing as the predominant modes production and livelihood. The Meiteis, on the other hand, because of a long history of settled agriculture, had been having a comparatively developed economic system, and it has in several respects been compared with those of their

neighbours at Irrawady Valley.* Throughout the centuries the Meitei Kings extended their political control over many tribes inhabiting the hilly regions of the state.

The present work is an attempt to examine the social and economic basis of the various popular movements which emerged in Manipur valley during a period of 59 years from 1891 to 1950. The period under study covers practically the whole duration of British control in Manipur (1891-1947). Colonialism, dictated by its own economic and political interests introduced new socio-economic measures in Manipur. The introduction of the bourgeois conception of property transformed the pre-colonial socio-economic system into a qualitatively new one. While the abolition of 'slavery' and *Pothang* (Begar) undermined traditional powers and authority of the native rulers and the aristocrats, the new measures, emancipated the peasants of Manipur from age long servitude. The new system of providing *patta* in land ownership further enabled the peasants to own land. Although all these measures initially seemed to be quite promising for them, the reality turned out to be the opposite of it. Introduction of a number of vexatious taxes coupled with the colonial policy of appropriating the traditional sources of livelihood like forests and fisheries aggravated the socio-economic conditions of the peasants. Further, the destruction of traditional handicrafts and cottage industries along with other problems created by the intruding money economy exposed the Manipuri peasants to the hard realities of colonial socio-economic system. The colonial policy of 'indirect rule' enabled the King to re-assert his customary socio-religious powers, and with that he went on exploiting the people in the name of religion. Thus, the people of Manipur suffered from the twin problems of colonialism as well as feudal autocracy and as a result they rose into agitation against both the problems. In certain instances popular struggle against colonial socio-economic system was helped by the traditional nobility because they had been deprived of their traditional rights

*T.C. Hodson, *The Meilies*. London 1908. Reprinted, New Delhi, 1975, p. xxi.

by the new system. People's protest against feudal socio-religious oppression, was however, led by the new educated group, who saw the king and his allies as the main opposition in their hunger for power and growth. The colonial policy of indirect rule, did not give the educated group a chance to confront the Britishers. The politics of the educated middle class was by and large confined to the level of their sectional interests.

✓ The work consists of six main chapters. The first chapter briefly discusses the general features of the socio-economic, political and religio-cultural systems and structures of Manipur during the 19th century. The second chapter examines the trends of structural transformations during the colonial period. Emphasis is given to the emergence of new socio-economic groups and their role in the colonial Manipur society. The third chapter examines various forms of popular movements launched against the oppressive socio-economic and religio-cultural policies of the feudal and colonial authorities between 1891 and 1920. The fourth chapter traces the emergence of the educated middle class, its consciousness and their moves for socio-economic changes in the 1930's. While the fifth chapter examines the dynamics of socio-economic changes during the Second World War, the sixth chapter discusses popular struggle for political democratization in the late 1940s. Serious attention is focused on the attitudes and aspirations of different social groups and the interplay among them.

N. LOKENDRA SINGH

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N. Lokendra Singh

ABBREVIATIONS

ARMS : Administration Reports of Manipur State

INC : Indian National Congress

INA : Indian National Army

MSC : Manipur State Council

MSD : Manipur State Durbar

NHMM: Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha

NMM : Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha

PMSD : President Manipur State Durbar

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MANIPUR DURING THE 19TH CENTURY

Society and Economy

Various writings and memoirs of British frontier officers, particularly those of Pemberton (1835), McCulloch (1859), Dun (1886), Brown (1874), and Johnstone (1896) provide a fairly good picture of the socio-economic and political system of Manipur during the 19th century. During the 19th century, Manipur was essentially a closed traditional society in which the King, his family members and the *Famnaibas* (Nobles) controlled both politics and economy. The king in alliance with the Brahmins regulated the religious life of the Meiteis, who became Hindus in the beginning of the 18th century. The economy was basically agrarian, and it was co-existing with a limited form of handicrafts and productions by artisans. The existing trade, both external and internal was small in scale and was meant essentially to meet the local demands.

Religion and Society

According to the Census of 1881, the population was estimated at 2,21,070 inhabitants, scattered over 950 villages and dwelling in 45,322 houses.¹ Classified according to religion, the population consisted of 2 Buddhists, 7 Christians, 4,881 Mohammedans, 85,288 Hillsmen and 1,30,822 Hindus. The Christians were the Political Agent, his family and

one guest. The Mohammedans were either migrants or war captives from the neighbouring district of Cachar. The Mohammedans had been gradually assimilated into the Meitei way of life, with its language and *ideosyncracies*. The hills people, who were essentially animists, had been gradually converted into Christianity and by 1961 census, 70 to 90 percent of the total population in the hills became Christians.² The Meiteis were predominantly Hindus and they constituted more than half of the total population of the State. Of the total Hindu population there were 15 Bengalis and 83 Hindusthanis. The Hindusthanis had migrated from the west in the 15th century. Hinduism was formally accepted by King Pamheiba in 1714 as the state religion, and since then the Meiteis, by and large, had been observing the Hindu rules of worship and other ceremonial rites.

As early as 1959, McCulloch (1844-62), observed that the hold of Hinduism among the Meiteis was only at a superficial level, it was "professed not from conviction but because it (was) a fashion".³ In fact, the brand of Hinduism that the Meiteis practiced during the 18th and 19th centuries had some unique local variations and it represented a blending of various elements of traditional Meitei religion and Hinduism. While there was an increasing popularity of the worship of many Hindu gods and goddesses there was also an equally strong hold of the traditional gods on the Meitei worshippers. Caste system, *Sati* and *Purdah* which were some of the disabling social aspects of Hinduism, did not play significant roles in the 18th and 19th centuries Meitei society. Such a peculiar phenomenon could be understood in the framework of two interacting forces (i) predominant influence of Vaishnavism which was anti-caste and anti-Ritual in character and (ii) stiff resistance from the traditional religion to the new faith.

Most of the scholars on Manipuri Vaishnavism generally agree that three Vaishnavite sects — Nimandi, Ramandi and Chaitanya Vaishnavism entered Manipur during the 17th and 18th centuries.⁴ These three sects had a lot of characteristics different from those of Brahmanical Hinduism because they

rose as a reaction against the orthodoxy and rigidity of the latter religion. While Nimandi led by Nimbaraka exalted the worship of Radha and Krishna and prescribed 'love' as the form of showing *Bhakti* to the God,⁵ Ramandi led by Ramananda prescribed the worship of Ram and Sita. The most significant aspect of this sect, however, was that it strongly denounced caste system and even allowed the outcastes to dine with the Brahmins provided they were worshippers of Vishnu. This group also popularised the use of vernacular language in Worshipping gods.⁶ Chaitanya Vaishnavism, on the other hand, condemned the ritual systems of Brahmins, attacked rites and ceremonies and discouraged asceticism. Chaitanya preached the brotherhood of all men regardless of caste and accepted even Muslims in the movement. He, like Nimbaraka, exalted the worship of Krishna and Radha and emphasized 'love' as the form of showing 'bhakti' to the God. S.N. Parrat has pointed out that even though all the three sects had entered Manipur during the last quarter of the 17th century, it was Chaitanya Vaishnavism which was accepted by King Pamheiba (1714-1754) in 1714, and it subsequently began to have increasing influence among the Meiteis. Immediately after the initiations into Hinduism, Pamheiba changed his name to Garibniwaj and declared Hinduism as the State religion. Apart from the personal factors, there were some other political reasons for Garibniwaj to accept and introduce Hinduism as the state religion. On the death of King Charairongba there was no potential claimant to the throne because Pamheiba the only son of the late king from the third queen Nungthil Chaibi was kept far away in the distant hills as the queen was believed to be scared of a possible reaction from political opponents in the palace. However, when there was not even a single male issue from the other queens, Pamheiba was brought back and enthroned as the King of Manipur. But the young King's claim to the throne did not go unchallenged. In the given situation the King probably desired to sanctify his claim by adopting Hinduism. The Hindu concept of 'Divine Kingship' was indeed what Pamheiba needed to legitimise his rule in Manipur. Further, since Vaishnavism represented a more progressive ideology, it had

attracted the attention of many people though it certainly did not grow unopposed. Moreover, Manipur during the period was constantly attacked by Burma. Pamheiba might have also needed the help of the shrewd Hindu Brahmins who had wide political contacts in India. No wonder, Garibniwaj defeated the Burmese Force three times during his reign. When Garibniwaj imposed Chaitanya Vaishnavism as the state religion, there were strong oppositions from the leaders of both the traditional Meitei religion and the rival Vaishnavite sects like Nimandi and Ramandi. The *Maibas and Maibis* (Priests and Priestesses) of the traditional religion, who formerly enjoyed royal patronage, were much antagonised because the Brahmins who were newly patronised by the King started challenging their authority and powers. The Maibas and the Maibis, therefore, resorted to taking shelter with political groups who opposed Garibniwaj. As a result, Garibniwaj persecuted the leaders of the traditional religion. Many of them were exiled to *Loi*⁷ villages. Garibniwaj also persecuted many leaders of the rival Vaishnavite sects because they too were taking help from many of his political opponents. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, the royal chronicle records that in 1742, he exiled many leaders of Ramandi Vaishnavism to Loi villages.⁸ Along with it, Garibniwaj took up a number of measures to consolidate Vaishnavism in Manipur. He issued a decree forbidding meat-eating. Offenders of Hindi dietary law which proscribed meat-eating and using of intoxicating drinks were severely punished.⁹ Decrees were also passed forbidding the keeping of unclean animals (pigs) in housing areas and he severely punished those who failed to comply with the orders.¹⁰ He also destroyed many of the traditional *Lais* (Local deities). He burnt many books on ancient religious literature and the event known as *Puran Meithaba* (Burning of Puranas) is remembered till today. Garibniwaj's attitude towards the traditional religion was, however, quite vacillating as he simultaneously encouraged the worshipping of many of the traditional *Lais*. Of course, in the context of a strong resistance from the traditional religion and its leaders, he could not have completely ignored the interests of the Maibas and Maibis.

After Garibniwaj, Labanyachandra tried to revert back to the traditional religion, but he was assassinated. The reason as to whether he was assassinated on religious or political grounds is not known. Bhagyachandra (1820-1849) further consolidated Vaishnavism in Manipur. During his reign Manipur was attacked and defeated three times by the Burmese and they set up puppet kings. Bhagyachandra with the help of the Assamese King established himself again as the King of Manipur. L. Ibungohal Singh wrote that Bhagyachandra repeatedly contacted the *Goshais* or religious leaders of Bengal for political reasons.¹¹ Bhagyachandra, besides confirming Hinduism as the state religion introduced a number of new measures to further strengthen it. During his reign, using of intoxicating drinks was a capital crime.¹² Those who ate meat were compelled to undergo 'purificatory rites',¹³ and killing of cows was also banned. He also installed many of the new Gods, like *Nityananda* and *Jagannath* who were closely associated with Chaitanya.¹⁴ In 1771, he got an image of Krishna constructed and installed it in a temple at Canchipur. Bhagyachandra also introduced and popularised the *Ras Lila*, which was a kind of dance-drama with a combination of traditional dance forms and Hindu religious themes. The king, however, continued to encourage the ancient Gods and he used to worship Sanamahi, the traditional family deity. S.N. Parratt has observed that during this period a *modus vivendi* between Hinduism and the traditional religion had reached. The hold of Hinduism on the Meiteis was further consolidated during the long and peaceful reign of Chandrakirti Singh (1850-1886). The king was initiated to Hinduism and made a direct disciple of the Bengali goshai of Murshidabad by the queen mother on political grounds.¹⁵ When he became the King of Manipur in 1850, a number of new measures to promote the cause of Hinduism, was introduced. During his reign dedication of public buildings, truth ordeals as well as settlement of disputes between the Brahmins took place before *Govindji*. The Vaishnavite forms of worship like the reading of *Bhagavat Gita* and *Ramayana* etc., were widely practiced.¹⁶ The idea and practice of religious 'out caste'

seems to have started during his reign as a public pavilion had to be dismantled because a supposedly profane European had entered the pavilion. Parratt wrote that during his time the practice of Hindu purificatory rites was much emphasized.

However, because of the peculiar feature of the growth of the religion, a part from the cultic aspects, other social facades of Hinduism such as caste system, sati, purdah, rigid pollution taboos on food and drink and low socio-economic position of women seemed to be of little prominence in the 19th century Meitei Society. McCulloch observed that during the 19th century the hold of Hinduism over the Manipuris was very superficial and it was only at its external appearances.¹⁷ He wrote, "children upto 10 or 12 years of age eat every sort of food without regard to Hindu notion of purity or impurity The very early marriage of Hinduism are not approved of and never take place".¹⁸ He further wrote, "*Sati* was unknown and widows were not treated as in Hindustan"¹⁹ and they might ". . . . marry again, eat such food, and dress in such style as they please".²⁰ He also wrote that it was a common practice for "old people to abandon altogether Hindu observances".²¹ Hinduism, indeed had still not taken its very conservative form. Caste system too was not very rigid. All Meiteis, including even the King, were *Kshetriyas* and except for the aristocrats and the nobles who tried to maintain social exclusiveness, the remaining Meitei *Kshetriyas* had an egalitarian relationship. There was no stratified caste system in the Meitei villages and the absence of occupational caste had helped the Meiteis to develop a community life based on co-operative labour. The concept of purity and pollution began to creep in only during the later part of 19th century eventhough the Lois in Sekmai, Andro, Phayeng, Sugnu and Leimaram began to be segregated from the Meitei masses during the 19th century. There were easier social interactions among the different social groups and inter-marriages among the different social groups were not uncommon. Upward movement in the social scale was also comparatively easy. In fact, any person whether male or female, marrying a higher caste could adopt

the higher caste status. In 1881 Hunter wrote "any hill man can become a Hindu and any low caste can rise in social scale".²² Such liberal rules of upward movement may perhaps be a means to popularise Hinduism in its early days. The King and the Brahmins in the 19th century wanted every one in Manipur to be a Hindu. McCulloch wrote in 1859, "The Raja, Brahmins and male members of the royal family give the thread indiscriminately"²³ though to receive it from the Raja and become his disciple seemed to be the preferred method.²⁴ Even though the Brahmins began to rise into prominence in the social hierarchy, as they regulated the religious life of the Meiteis, McCulloch stated that "inwardly they were not felt to be of superior caste as claimed by them, and at times have been taunted being sons of *Keis* (slaves)".²⁵ In fact, the Brahmins who first came to Manipur were absorbed into the Meitei society through marriage with *Kei* females. The King was still considered to be the supreme religious head and the Brahmins were practically under his control. On occasions of a clash between the Brahmins and the King the will of the latter always prevailed. For example, Gambhir Singh once ordered a Brahmin who had failed to take proper care of pet goose which had been entrusted to his care, to eat the bird which had died from neglect.²⁶ Also he was the only authority who could exile the religious opponents to the Loi villages

✓ Another important feature of the 19th century Manipur society, quite a unique feature of a Hindu society, is the prominent socio-economic role of the women, though in an apparently paradoxical way. 19th century Colonial writers were indeed, quite puzzled with such a situation. While the women's legal status in the society and the wifely role in the family were considerably eroded during this period, they continued to play crucial roles in the society. In 1886, Dun wrote about the general social attitudes and behaviour of the Meitei women, ". . . . the women of Manipur married or unmarried are not confined to *Zenanas* as they are in Bengal or Hindusthan (nor) do they cover their faces before stranger".²⁷ Referring to their role in the economy Dun further wrote, ". . . . all the marketing is done by the

women, all the works of buying and selling in public, carrying to and fro of articles to be sold; whilst at home they are busily employed in weaving and spinning."²⁸ However, he also pointed out that ". . . with their industry and usefulness women hold a very inferior position and are considered more in the light of goods and chattels than as persons to be treated with honour and considerations."²⁹ McCulloch also gave almost the same view, ". . . though useful and laborious (they) are but indifferently treated . . . A man can put away his wife without any fault on her part, and if a person of influence, he may do so without it being noticed . . . women are really slaves of their husbands; they are sold in satisfaction of their debts."³⁰ He had even heard of men pawning their wives for money to purchase some office or even a pony.³¹ Thus, closer examination reveals that while the emerging patriarchal social system and Hindu ideology eroded their legal status in the society their traditional roles in the economy continued as before.

Political System

In Manipur, Monarchy, in which the king was the secular and spiritual head was the form of the Government. During the pre-colonial days, the King's immediate brothers and sons played crucial roles in the functioning of the Government. The 'heads' of the clan groups were always associated with administrative works. Commoners were not excluded from the important works of the Government but such instances were very rare. The day-to-day administration of the state was looked after by the Durbar, which included most of the important officers of the state. The immediate younger brother of the king used to be the *Yubraj* or heir-apparent to the throne, and the brother next to the Yubaraja was the *Senapati* or Commander of the army. Next to the *Senapati* came the *Kotwal* or head of the police. Then came *Sagolhanjaba* or master of horses and *Dolaihanjaba* or master of doolies. All these officers were members of the Durbar. Jyotirmoy Roy argued that either in the absence of any brother or his becoming disloyal to the King, the aforesaid posts would go to the sons of the King.³² During the pre-colonial days law of primogeniture was not in force and

hence there was no well-established form of succession to the throne. The appointments to high offices seemed to depend virtually on the wishes of the King. There used to be a constant struggle for the throne among the potential claimants in the royal family. Within a time span of 32 years i.e. between 1834 and 1866, there were as many as fifteen attempts to overthrow the King.³³

There was no separation of executive and judicial powers in the strict sense of the term. All the Durbar members were the *ex-officio* members of the Cheirap Court, the highest Court of justice in the state. Traditional customary laws were the basis of judgement and the most common forms of punishment were death for murder and treason; exile to Loi villages for adultery etc. The King's relatives and Brahmins were however exempted from many of the customary punishments. The *Bijoy Garod* or the central organization of the army consisted of eight senior army officers presided over by the Senapati. During the reign of Chandrakirti Singh, a post named *Awa-Purel* (Minister in-charge of Burma) was created, with the sole purpose of looking after the Burmese affairs as the latter was a constant source of menace throughout the whole of the 18th and the 19th centuries. There was another Court called *Pacha* (Women's Court) in which all cases of disputes involving women were dealt with. The existence of such an unique Court of women presided by themselves and dealing with cases relating to women only further re-enforces the arguments of a strong socio-economic role of the women in the society. Common cases like divorce and adultery were brought to this Court. The form of punishment for adultery was *Khungoinaba*³⁴ and an exile to Loi villages. In the villages, there were *Singlups* (traditional village clubs)³⁵ and all the villagers were supposed to be members of such an institution. The Singlups were essentially meant to meet the socio-economic needs of the villagers. If a villager faced some hardships like death, sickness, starvation etc., the Singlup would come to the help of the villager. The village head-man, who was appointed by the King for the realisation of *lallup* (corvee) and other taxes, used to take charge of such Singlups.

Agrarian Relations

Agriculture was the main-stay of the economy. According to 1881 census, out of a total population of 221070 persons, 107937 persons depended on agriculture. People in the hills practiced Slash and burn or *Jhum* agriculture whereas the peasant communities in the plain areas practiced wet rice agriculture. The method and technology of the production was a fairly developed one as compared with those of the neighbouring communities. E.W. Dun referred to striking similarities between the agricultural practices of Manipur and those of East Bengal. Two fundamental forms of cultivation — (i) *Punghool*, in which seeds were directly sown in the well ploughed fields and (ii) *Lingba* in which transplantation of seedlings from the nurseries were extensively used in the valley areas of Manipur.³⁶ The tools and implements of cultivation were also not qualitatively different from those in East Bengal. Animal power, particularly bullocks and buffaloes were commonly used in drawing ploughs and carts. *Langol* (Iron tipped single hoe plough), *Kangpot* (sledge), *Ukai* (harrow), *Humai* (Fan for winnowing the paddy), *Cheirong* (paddy thresher) etc. were the important implements of cultivation. *Yot* (spade), *Thangol* (sickle), *Thangjou* (multi-purpose large dao) and *Singjang* (a solid iron hand axe) were also commonly used though the use of wheel cart was not popular during the 19th century.

The soil was very fertile. Silt brought from the hills by the numerous streams constantly enriched the upper layer of agricultural land in the valley area. It was believed that even in the time of harvest failure due to some reason or the other, crops from only the Thoubal area was sufficient to feed the entire population. The valley people had also developed through the centuries their own system of water management. Through the indigenous methods of *Thingel* (dams/dykes), *Khong* (Canal), *Tutengba* (dredging of rivers) etc., the people of Manipur valley succeeded in harnessing 142 cm. of annual average monsoon rain to their advantage and made the place one of the most fertile rice-producing areas in the entire region. In fact, the people of Manipur

had developed a fairly advanced form of rice culture. E.W. Dun recorded that as many as 15 varieties of rice were grown in the valley area during the 19th Century. The productivity had also been recorded to be very high, ranging from 80 to 100 pots.³⁷ Further, the Manipuri peasants were also equipped with sustainable quantity of agricultural implement and other means of production. Dun, in his gazetteer, has given statistics of the number of livestock, carts, inhabitants etc. for every important village in Manipur. A calculation of the above data gives an impression that a family of 5 persons in the valley owned 3.5 cattle and a wheelless cart.³⁸ Despite all these advantages, there were no sign of any growth of the agrarian economy. There was absolutely no expansion of agricultural activities. In fact, Dun had recorded that only of $\frac{1}{4}$ of the valley area was under cultivation³⁹ and such a situation seems to be a classic case of arrested agricultural development characteristic of a pre-modern, traditional society.

Although there are some differences among British anthropologists and administrators in their understanding of the forms of land ownership,⁴⁰ they all agreed that the land system of the valley started with the assumption that all the lands belonged to the Raja and that he could give away or retain land as he pleased. For revenue purposes the land in the valley was classified into (a) *Ingkhol* (homestead land) occupied by the houses and gardens, and (b) *Lou* (Paddy field). All the *Ingkhol* lands were free from revenue and could be sold at the pleasure of the owner. It was inheritable and transferable. An officer called *Kotwal* was in-charge of the *Ingkhol* land within the Imphal area. He kept a register showing the name of the owner and the location of the lands.⁴¹ Most of the *Lous* were subjected to payment of revenue in cash or kind. In 1886, Dun wrote that *Funan Selungba* superintended in all matters connected with cultivation i.e. measurement of land and receipt of land revenue in kind.⁴² At the village level the headman, as the agent of the King, looked after the cultivation and was responsible for the realisation of tax payable by the cultivators in his village.

However, Howell wrote that an Officer called *Lourungba* (Officer-in charge of paddy field) was given the responsibility to collect revenue payable in rice whereas another officer known as *Phourungba* (Officer-in-charge of paddy) was responsible for the collection of revenue in Paddy.⁴³ The actual collection of revenue at the village level was done by the village - *Lou pannaba* (Watchman of paddy fields) and it was from his *Keis* (Granaries) that the *Lourungba* used to take rice as was required. The *Lourungba* also maintained the settlement records.⁴⁴

Lous or paddy-fields constituted a very significant portion of landed property in Manipur and they were held by the owners under different systems of tenure. Howell has recorded 9 types of land tenure (3 revenue — paying and 6 revenue free) that were in practice in the 1890s. L. Ibungohal Singh has referred to 4 categories of tenure. These categories were evidently the popular names of some of the tenures which Howell had already discussed. Howell has also provided a comprehensive table showing the amount of land under each tenure and the rate of revenue chargeable from each category. A rearranged version of the table given below will give a picture of the different systems of tenure and their share in the agrarian economy of Manipur valley. The Table 1.1 will also provide some ideas on the agrarian structure of the state.

Before one proceeds to give a detailed analysis of each tenure, a few observations on Table 1.1, which have direct bearing with the agrarian economy of the valley may be made. Out of a total cultivated area of 26,500 paries in 1891, land tax was collected from only 9,900 paries or 38 per cent of the total cultivated area and the remaining 16,600 paries or 62 per cent of the land were revenue-free. The tax was collected mostly in kind either in rice or paddy and only in some rare instances it was collected in cash. The rate of revenue for the tax-paying lands was astonishingly low varying from 1 pot to 12 pots per pari, depending on the nature of the tenure. The total revenue collected both in

Table 1.1 : Break-up data of different tenures of land during the 19th century			
A. Tax Paying Land			
<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Type of tenure</i>	<i>Amount of land under each tenure</i>	<i>Rate of revenue per Pari</i>
1.	Taona (lou)	5,000 Paries	6 Chenggoks of rice
2.	Sarkari (lou)	3,700 Paries	Different rate of revenue depending on the type of tenure
3.	Pham (lou)	1,200 Paries	1 Pot of Dhan
B. Tax Free Land			
<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Type of tenure</i>	<i>Amount of land under each tenure</i>	<i>Rate of revenue per Pari</i>
1.	Sepoys (lou)	9,000 Paries	Revenue free
2.	Mana (lou)	3,000 Paries	Revenue free
3.	Brahmins (lou)	2,500 Paries	Revenue free
4.	Royal family (lou)	1,000 Paries	Revenue free
5.	Maharani (lou)	600 Paries	Revenue free
6.	Temple (lou)	600 Paries	Revenue free
GRAND TOTAL 26,500 Paries			
<i>Source : A.A. Howell, Short Account of Land Revenue in Manipur, p.9.</i>			
1. Pari	=	2½ Acres	
6 Chenggoks	=	3 Mounds of Rice	
1 Pot	=	2 Baskets of 60 lbs (R.Brown).	
12 Pots	=	15 mounds.	

kind as well as cash was extremely low by any standard. As late as 1907 J. Shakespeare, the Political Agent of Manipur wrote that the land revenue of Manipur before the British takeover was shown as 85,000 mounds of paddy of which half was nibbled away by the officials concerned and the other half was consumed by the Raja and his followers.⁴⁵ The Manipuri rulers during the 19th century did not give any importance to any increase in the revenue nor did they plan for efficient collection of the revenue. It appears that the entire land revenue system of the state was not geared

to either enrich the state or develop the agrarian economy as a whole. What then were the general characteristics of the Agrarian system which sustained the Manipuri rulers during the 19th century ? A detailed discussion on the different land tenures with particular reference to the policy and pattern of distribution of land and also of revenue system will perhaps explain the essential motive force that governed the specific character of a backward and underdeveloped socio-economic and political system of Manipur during that period. Further, such a discussion may also help in the delineation of the broad contours of agrarian structures of the region.

Tax Free Tenures

1. Taunalou

It was a category of rice land in which the ownership rights of the possessor was very strong. Apart from the inherited ones Taunalou could be obtained either (i) by purchase or (ii) by clearing jungles⁴⁶ though the 1st method was very rarely used. If a piece of new land was taken up as Taunalou it was made revenue-free for the first three years as a sign of encouragement.⁴⁷ Revenue from such lands were collected at the rate of 3 mounds of rice per pari, and this was the only type of land for which revenue was paid in rice. The revenue of such lands could at times be collected in cash calculated at the time of collection. All such lands were inheritable and disposable, even the Raja could not evict the holders of such lands without paying them compensation.⁴⁸ Although the holder of such land could be evicted if his revenue was due for more than a year he could claim his holding again after paying the due amount. Taunalou holders however, could be turned out from his land if he failed to cultivate the land regularly.⁴⁹ There were certain other genuine disadvantages of holding Taunalou lands, i.e. (i) revenue from such lands could be collected any time of the year and the king usually waited for the price to rise and then ordered the holder to pay revenue, and (ii) the Taunalou

holders were obliged to carry and pay the revenue to any place he was ordered to carry. Because of such inconveniences such tenure was not much preferred though land in the distant and interior areas such as, Wangu, Sugnu, Kakching etc. were normally allowed to be held under such tenure.⁵⁰ Although such lands could be *subletted* they were normally cultivated by the landholders and their families.

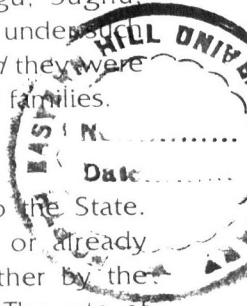
2. Sarkarilou

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This category of land theoretically belonged to the State. These land could either be unclaimed Virgin or already claimed ones. These lands were cultivated either by the *Phunganaïs* (slaves) or the common peasants. The rate of revenue differed depending on the nature of the tenure. A slave couple who was given plough, cattle, implements and 1 ½ paries of land was supposed to pay to the King 40 pots of paddy annually.⁵¹ An unmarried slave who was given one pari along with the implements and cattle had to pay 30 pots of paddy.⁵² When such land was leased to ordinary peasants only 12 pots of paddy per pari was taken as rent.⁵³ Slaves used to cultivate the Raja's lands for years altogether but quite often the land cultivated by the ordinary peasants were used to be given to other cultivators depending on the convenience of the Raja. If a peasant wished to clear a new piece of land he was required to inform the Lou-panaba who took the final decision. He measured the land and used to erect a flag to show that the land had been claimed. It was then decided whether the land would be held as Taunalou or Sarkari.⁵⁴ Land near Imphal was normally held under Sarkari tenure. Even though, the rate of revenue for such lands was high, such lands were much preferred due to the possibility of having access to people in power. The peasants were also saved from all the trouble faced by Taunalou-holders.

3. Phamlou

These were rice lands held by the officers of the state in lieu of their salary. Theoretically, if revenue was not paid in time



the Phamlous could be confiscated and given to others,⁵⁵ but such incidents were very rare. These lands were cultivated either by the personal slaves of the officers or the common peasants but the latter had to pay a higher rent, running as high as 12 pots which was said to be 'outside the limit'.⁵⁶ The Phamlou holders used to give revenue to the state at the rate of 1 pot of paddy (2 baskets) per pari annually,⁵⁷ thereby saving a substantial amount of paddy for themselves. All the matters connected with the Phamlou lands either for distribution or the collection of revenue were very carefully handled by the concerned officers because the Phamlou holders constituted the core ruling groups of the State.

4. *Sepoyslou*

During the 19th century the Sepoys and other officers of the native army were given lands in lieu of their salaries and these land were known as Sepoy's Lou or *Siphai Lou*. During the 19th century (i) A Major received 1 pari of land for each Company he commanded; (ii) A Pahila received 6 paries; (iv) A Jamadar received 3 paries; (v) A Kotwal received 2½ paries; (vi) A Havildar received 2 paries; (vii) An Amoldar received 1¼ paries; (viii) A Kotondar received 1½ paries; and (ix) A Sepoy received 1¼ paries.⁵⁸ If a sepoy died leaving one or more children, two sangams of land (½ pari) were set apart for their support and the rest used to revert back to the Raja.⁵⁹ In case the children happened to be girls all lands were reverted to the Raja. As soon as a sepoy's son became fit for work he became a sepoy and he received 1¼ paries for his maintenance. Sepoys who had surplus land could sublet it with the usual rent of 12 pots of paddy per pari but they were not allowed to sell it.⁶⁰

Thus, as the very existence of the state depended on the efficiency and commitment of the army, *sepoyslou* was very carefully handled. Every able-bodied person was supposed to become a sepoy and the sons of the sepoys were prohibited from performing other duties in order to enable them

to succeed their respective fathers as sepoy. The conditions of this category of tenure was very attractive and no wonder Siphailou constituted the most significant portion the cultivable land.

5. *Manalou*

Rewards of paddy fields was usually given in recognition of a person's contribution to the state or the Raja and such lands were known as Manalou. The grantee could use the land only during his lifetime and after his death, the land used to revert back to the Raja. If his heirs wished to continue possessions of these lands, they were supposed to pay revenue at the rate of Sarkari land, i.e. 12 pots of paddy per pari.⁶¹ The Manalou holders also constituted, a major social force that either strengthened or weakened a particular ruling group in the state.

6. *Brahminlou*

This category of land grant was popularly known as *Lugunlou*. Since the 18th and 19th century Manipuri rulers were staunch Vaishnavites. A Brahmin on taking the thread received 1 pari of land from the Raja as a customary right though sometimes, they were given more. When the Brahmin died, his widow was allowed to keep $\frac{1}{2}$ pari for the support of herself and her children. All the rest of her husband's land used to revert back to the Raja. The Brahmin lou could not be sold.

7. *Templelou*

This kind of land grant was also known as *Lailou*. Temples and *Umanglais* (Forest deities) were granted paddy field for their maintenance and these lands never revert back to the Raja. Govindajee, the temple of the royal family was granted 100 paries of land and these were cultivated by the Keis or slaves of the temple who lived in the four villages of Charangpat, Thinunggei, Ningthoukhong and Uyial.⁶² The lailous of the Umanglais were communally looked after, but in special cases they were cultivated by the ordinary peasants, on payment of 12 pots of paddy per pari.

8. *Royal family lou*

Members of the royal family were also granted lands and these lands were probably handed down from father to son. Ibungohal Singh called these lands *Sanalou*. In 1891 the Maharani possessed 600 paries. The members of the royal family were the biggest landlords in the state.

9. *Pangallou*

Persons of distinguished service in war were granted such lands. These lands also used to be handed down from father to son and in 1891 Howell reported that there were 200 persons who hold Pangal (lou).⁶³ The Pangallou holders were normally the favourites of the king.

Thus, during the 19th century, there were broadly 4 important groups which constituted the agrarian structure of the place. They are — (i) the King and his immediate family members who were the biggest landlords of the land, (ii) the officers of the state who were endowed with land by the King in lieu of their service and the favourites of the King who were granted rent-free land for their distinctive services to the State, (iii) the semi-servile peasants, who, except for a small number of Taunalou holders, were almost landless, and (iv) the slaves who were absolutely landless. So far as the question of total cultivable land controlled by each of the above social group were concerned it may be stated that one third of the total arable land was given by the King to his nobles and officials for their services.⁶⁴ This category constituted mostly the Phumlou-holders. Theoretically, these officials had to pay the King a nominal revenue of 1 pot of paddy per pari though the terms and conditions of these lands varied, depending on the wishes of the Raja. In addition to the big landed estate, many of the officers and nobles were entitled to get *Looill* (follower), who performed any work assigned to them.⁶⁵ A few high ranking officers were given Naga villages and those villagers were supposed to work for them. The privilege of *Yimtinaba*, a system by which the clans-men of an officer used to serve

him in time of his necessities was given to few higher officers.⁶⁶ This group of officers which developed along with the process of the formation of Meitei State early in the Christian era, assumed the character of Indianised Court elite with broad paraphernalia in the 18th and 19th century. They became an essential class in the pre-colonial traditional social order with wide privileges and jurisdictions. It was in alliance with such a powerful social group that the king succeeded in ruling over the masses.

Another one-third of the land was given by the King to his relatives, Brahmins, the sepoys and other favourites.⁶⁷ The terms and conditions of this category of tenure were lighter than those of the former ones and in fact, most of the owners of this type of land were exempted from taxation. Land grants such as Manalou, Pangallou, Sipoyslou, Lailou, Sanalou came under this category and these lands did not bring any revenue to the king. These grantees controlled their land with family slaves and semi-servile tenants. Although outwardly there was hardly any difference between this group and the officers in terms of status and authority in the society, the holders of this category of land certainly had a more politico-legal authority over their land than those of the officers.

The remaining one-third constituted the Taunalou and the Sarkari land. These lands were normally leased to the peasants in return for a customary kind rent at 12 pots of paddy per pari. Whereas Taunalou was cultivated by the common peasants, the Sarkari land were cultivated by the slaves. In 1886, Dun recorded that the king of Manipur, had slaves ranging between 1,200 and 1,500 only.⁶⁸ Even though British writers recorded that slavery was quite mild in Manipur and also that they were treated as a part of the family of the masters, the slaves definitely suffered from low social and economic conditions. While an ordinary peasants had to pay a rent of only 12 pots, the slaves on an average had to pay an extremely high rent of 40 pots per pari. Along with this they were supposed to provide free service to their masters. However, considering the number of slaves and also

the role played by them in the overall economy of the state, slavery did not seem to be a predominant form of labour exploitation in Manipur valley during the 19th century.

The conditions of Taunalou cultivator, thus was better than those of the cultivators of any other category of tenure including the tenants of the nobles and the King. However, since Taunalous were located at geographically and economically unfavourable areas, and also since the peasants were very often subjected to extortions, they were compelled to cultivate the land of the nobles who actually controlled most of the fertile and well situated lands. It may further be pointed out that given the traditional form of Technology and limited labour-supply it was difficult to reclaim uncultivated land. In addition to all these, McCulloch noted that there was a system of imposing *Keiroithou* (duty of Keis or slaves) over the people living in outlying places far away from Imphal, and this also to a great extent, inhibited the peasants from reclaiming new lands.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, in view of Dun's observation that the worst pari of land produced at least 80.5 pots,⁷⁰ the revenue of 6 chenggoks for Taunalou and 12 pots for Sarkari and Phamlous were not much of an economic burden to the peasants.

What was really torturous to the Manipuri peasants, however, was the harsh form of bondage under the Lallup system. The 19th century Manipuri rulers indeed, gave a lot of emphasis on revenue in labour rather than on revenue in kind or cash. Under the Lallup system every male member between the age of 17 and 60 was supposed to render labour-service for 'ten days out of every forty days' to the king. Before Gambhir Singh (1825-34), lallup service was an essentially military service but with the introduction of regular army during the latter's reign, the lallups were required to provide civil services to the different *Loishangs* (departments) of the palace. R. Brown recorded 26 functional departments in which the lallups were supposed to work.⁷¹ In addition to the task of working in the King's loishangs, the lallups as desired by the authorities, worked for the different civil work

programme of the state such as, construction of roads, bridges and dredging of rivers. Apart from the Meitei population, all the other communities such as the different hill tribes, the Mohammedans, the Lois, the Mayangs or the migrants from Hindusthan etc. who were subjects of the Meitei King were also incorporated into the fold of the lallup system. While the Tangkhul Nagas were used as gardeners and also for digging ponds and ditches, the Mohammedans were used as grass cutters. The Loi population manufactured silk, smelt iron, manufactured salt, earthen vessels and distilled liquor,⁷² whereas the tribes in the more distant hills like the Maos and Marams, instead of giving labour used to pay a small tribute in kinds.⁷³ There was, however, no fixed rules. The Maos for example, had to work for the Kohima road, build rest houses and carry loads for touring officers. The Marrings, a tribe of clever basket-makers, made baskets for the Government. They also collected leaves which could be used for dyeing purposes for the Government. The hill men very frequently used to carry trading materials for the Raja from Cachar.⁷⁴

Since lallup was the backbone of the state, an efficient administrative machinery to enforce the system was set up. The whole valley was divided into four *Panas* or administrative units — (i) Ahallup, (ii) Naharup, (iii) Khabam, and (iv) Laipham. These four panas were further sub-divided into 107 villages, each village being put under a headman. The headman used to decide the kind of work for each and every individual engaged in lallup duty. Problems related to this system were discussed in the *Khundin* (General meeting of the village) which was held at regular intervals. In, 1908, Hodson wrote that in the case of a lallup member being unable to attend to his duties due to sickness or some other reasons, the lallup member was required to pay a fine of Re. 1 per 10 days to pay for substitute.⁷⁵ Thus, such a system did not seem to affect the nobles and other well-to-do people, because they could escape the lallup duty by paying fines. The village head-men, Pana leaders and all other officers connected with the lallup system were appointed

by the king from among his favourites. The *Piba* (the head of the clan) and some of the close favourites of the King were exempted from the lallup service. There was, however, no hard and fast rule; every thing depended on the wishes of the King.

Thus, the 19th century Manipuri peasants were more or less serfs of some kind with little freedom of movement or action and often subjected to periodical oppressions and harassment by rapacious nobles and officers. Despite such problems, the peasants did not suffer from real economic hardship and there were no instances of agrarian unrest in Manipur valley during 19th century. But there were a lot of tensions and conflicts among the ruling groups.

Trade and Industry

Comparative isolation from wider economic cross-currents, geo-topographical hurdles and the absence of an organised trading group led to the prevalence of a relatively low level of trade and commerce during pre-colonial days. A limited form of external trade existed between Manipur and Cachar in the west. Some Manipuri traders used to import betel-nut and piece goods and in return exported buffaloes, ponies and cloths to Cachar. The King and the native aristocracy were the main consumers of such imported items. Even though Pemberton recorded that Manipuri traders had trading relationships with the Burmese through Kabow valley and contacted the Chinese traders from Yunnan, who took away wax and ivory, in return for their silk, this trade did not form a significant feature of the 19th century Manipuri economy.⁷⁶ The trade between Burma and Manipur was also terminated because of the emerging antagonistic relationship between the two powers. The Britishers attempted to expand the external trade of Manipur. During the reign of Chandrakirti, the British Political Agent, in order to popularise Manipuri products, sent specimens of Manipuri cattle and cloth for display and sale in an exhibition at Calcutta. However, it could not draw the attention of big merchants and traders.

The internal trade was carried on essentially by women in the various open Bazars in the valley. All the women sellers were retailers, who dealt chiefly in immediate consumption goods. The most important bazar in the valley was the *Khwairamband bazar* or Sana-Keithel, at Imphal. Dun recorded that in many of such market places throughout the valley “. . . during the early part of the day, women congregate with their wares for sale.”⁷⁷ No male person excepting the hill men and Europeans were allowed to enter the market, and indeed “. . . all the buying and selling (was) conducted by women.”⁷⁸ According to 1881 census out of a total number of 15,433 persons depending on commerce, women accounted for 14,861 personnel.⁷⁹ The chief articles of sale in the market consisted of daily consumption goods like dry-fish, rice, fresh vegetable, cloths etc. ‘Barter’ among the direct producers was widely prevalent though ‘Sel’ a crude native bell metal currency of the size of 16 grains and coined at the Raja’s mint, was used in the market. In 1873, the value of sel was such that 428 sels were equal to 1 British or Burmese Rupee and the exchange rate varied from 420 to 450 sels for a Rupee. The British and Burmese currencies were also used in restricted circles, particularly among the merchants who were involved in external trade. R. Brown recorded that women seller in the Bazar refused to accept the ‘copper coins’ which the Political Agent tried to introduce in the state. All these features point out the fact that there was an extremely limited monetisation in the economy. Up till the end of 19th century, the King of Manipur, like many of the medieval feudal lords, collected direct taxes from the sellers in the market. Dun recorded that many of the Raja’s servants called *Hao-machas* (Hill man), ten in number, used to visit the bazar daily and take from the women sellers enough food to meet the King’s needs for a day.⁸⁰

The 19th century Manipuri Kings, particularly, Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh (1834-1944; 1850-1886) was quite particular in maintaining the isolation of the relatively closed but independent kingdom of Manipur. They were apprehen-

sive of the outside links, particularly the link with the Britishers. In 1880's when Johnstone, the Political Agent attempted to grow some tea for his personal consumption, Chandrakirti sent his messenger to inform him that he would not be allowed to grow any tea, but that all his requirements would be met by the government of Manipur.⁸¹ Chandrakirti Singh also imposed heavy taxes on external trades of Manipur. In 1868-1869, the total amount of taxes collected from both the exports and imports of Manipur was a mere Rs. 7,506.00 a.2, p.3,⁸² when the total revenue of the state was calculated to be around Rs. 25,000 to 30,000 only.⁸³ Though, the share of trade in the total revenue of the state was about 30 per cent,⁸⁴ the total volume of external as well as internal trade was very limited and it was never strong enough to open the closed society of Manipur.

The traditional handicrafts and cottage industries of 19th century Manipur consisted of carpentry, blacksmithy, weaving, jewellery etc. In 1881, out of a total industrial population of 3,042, there were 110 carpenters, 326 silk weavers, 410 potters, and 1,163 salt-makers.⁸⁵ The Europeans were quite impressed by the quality of the products and the skills of the artisans. Commenting on the quality of locally woven coarse kind of cloth R. Brown stated, ". . . the more I see of them the more I am impressed with the excellence of Manipur cotton manufacturers, which are all of first rate quality and very cheap when their weight was considered."⁸⁶ Regarding carpentry Dun wrote ". . . the Manipuris have great reputation as carpenters in the adjoining province of Cachar and Sylhet, specially for the better kinds of works; here good workmen are entirely monopolised by the Raja. The good carpenters there are, however, capable of turning out first rate work and can imitate English work successfully."⁸⁷ About 'turning' Dun wrote ". . . turning in wood and ivory is common. They can also make silver glass and electroplate, good serviceable locks and can at a pinch repair and clean a clock."⁸⁸

Despite the fairly sophisticated and advanced form of Manipuri craftsmanship the Manipuri manufactures they did not develop because most of the productions were small in

scale, and meant to serve the local demands, particularly the King, his family and the nobility. The Britishers did send a lot of specimens of the Manipuri products, particularly cloths for display and sale in many exhibitions held in Calcutta and London. But it could not attract attentions for external markets.

Early Contact with the British

Such a closed and traditional society came into contact with East India Company in 1762, when Haridas Gossain an emissary of the King of Manipur, Jai Singh (1759-1798), went to Calcutta to plead for their help against the invading Burmese forces. The agreement signed between the two parties included, (i) grants of land to be made to the English, which would be sufficient for the establishment of a factory and a fort, and also additional land of 81,000 cubits round such factory and fort, free of rent for ever, (ii) the King of Manipur was to provide every facility for the prosecution of trade with China, and (iii) indemnity was to be paid to the English for the injuries they had sustained at Negrais and at Pegu from Burmese violence and treachery. In return, the East India Company agreed to help the King of Manipur with six companies of sepoy to drive out the Burmese and counter-attack them.⁸⁹ As per the terms of the agreement, Major Verelst, came to the border of Manipur but returned to Calcutta in the face of bad weather conditions and some other political considerations requiring him back at Chittagong. The Britishers, however, became well acquainted with Manipur in the Anglo-Burmese War (1824-25), when Maharaja Gambhir Singh solicited British help to repel Burmese invasion. This was the time when the British power started having a genuine interest in the North Eastern region of India. While there was a strong feeling of *Burmophobia* due to the extension of the British empire up to Cachar, British capital had also started penetrating into Brahmaputra Valley, particularly in Plantation industries. Precisely because of these two interests the British authority began to take keen interests in the affairs of Manipur.

In 1819, when Burma attacked Manipur and installed a puppet King, Marjit Singh (1812-1819), the deposed King of Manipur, took shelter in Cachar. The Burmese control in Manipur lasted for nearly seven years (1819-1826). In 1824, the Burmese attempted to cross over to Cachar. Obviously the British authority felt the necessity of repelling the Burmese from Manipur and subsequently with the help of Gambhir Singh (1826-1834), they defeated the Burmese in the Anglo-Burmese war in 1826. The Treaty of Yandaboo was signed on 24th February 1826, and it recognised Gambhir Singh's claim to the throne of Manipur. The constitutional position of Manipur *vis-a-vis* the Britishers was, however, not clearly mentioned, Mackenzie wrote, "Manipur . . . though independent is at the same time a protected state."⁹⁰

In 1835, a Political Agent was first appointed ". . . for the preservation of a friendly intercourse and as a medium of communication with the Manipur Government, and as occasion may require, with the Burmese authorities on that frontier, and more especially to prevent border feuds, which might lead to hostilities between Manipuri and the Burmese."⁹¹ In 1870, the Government of India further defined the duties of the Political Agent. The Political Agent was required to see that the King of Manipur strictly fulfilled the duties which the Raja was "bound by the treaty to perform". Simultaneously the King of Manipur, particularly Chandrakirti Singh was quite careful in handling the Political Agents. He always tried to check the increasing powers and influence of the Political Agents. Thus, the history of Anglo-Manipuri relation during the 19th century was one of constant efforts on both the sides to promote and maintain their interests. While Captain Durand, the Political Agent, wrote that "The Political Agent (was) dependent on the will and pleasure of the Maharaja for everything (and) in fact a British officer under Manipur surveillance",⁹² Johnstone, another Political Agent wrote, "In my dealing with the Durbar, I always tried to bear in mind that I was the representative of the strong with the weak whenever it became for me to interfere I did so with great firmness but always tried to carry the

Maharaja and his Ministers with me."⁹³ In fact, there had been consistent attempts by both the British Political Agents and the kings of Manipur to assert their authority in the state. Legally, however, Manipur never acknowledged the suzerainty of the British Government. Cheitharol Kumbaba and Bijoy Panchali reflected a strong sense of independence in the minds as well as the actions of the Manipuri Kings while dealing with the Britishers.

In September, 1891, a clash broke out between two contending factions of princes in Manipur and it proved to be a good opportunity for the Britishers to interfere in the affairs of the State. During the reign of Maharaja Surchandra Singh (1886-1890), the ruling family was clearly divided into two groups, four princes in each group. The first group of four uterine brothers including the Maharaja himself was led by prince Paccasana, while the second group of four half brothers was led by prince Tikendrajit Singh, the *Senapatee* of the state.⁹⁴ Since Surchandra was a King of sober character⁹⁵ the tension among the princes grew unabated and it reached a climax on 21st September, 1890 when Tikendrajit and his party scaled the palace walls and fired a few shots in the air. The threat was enough for Surchandra to seek refuge at the British Residency. The supporters of Surchandra grew in number that night and about 20 supporters were accommodated in the Residency houses and some others were kept in the out houses of the Residency. The Political Agent, Mr. Grimwood, anticipating violence disarmed the supporters of Surchandra. This probably disheartened Surchandra and on the next day, contrary to the advice of the Political Agent, the King proclaimed his intention to abdicate and proceed on a pilgrimage to Brindavan. On 23rd he left the state accompanied by his three brothers and a few followers and reached Cachar by the end of the month. At Cachar he changed his mind and represented to the Chief Commissioner of Assam that he had no intention of abdicating the throne and solicited assistance to regain the *gadi*.

Meanwhile in Manipur, Tikendrajit induced his elder brother Jubraj Kulachandra Singh to occupy the *gadi* and

requests were made to the Government of India to ratify the accession. The Government of India considered the whole question and concluded, "that it would be to the advantage of the Manipur State to recognise the Jubraj in his new position rather than to restore Surchandra Singh."⁹⁶ It was, however, decided "to remove the *Senapati* from Manipur and punish him for his lawless conduct towards his elder brother."⁹⁷ As the Chief Commissioner of Assam was directed to go to Manipur and carry out the orders of the Government of India Mr. Quinton, the Chief Commissioner of Assam left for Imphal with an escort of 400 sepoy of the Gurkha Rifles, under the command of Lt. Col Skene.⁹⁸ The British troops arrived at Sekmai on 1st June. On the way to Imphal the British officers noticed movements of Manipuri forces. Even a bridge near Sekmai was on fire, indicating that the Manipuris were interested in resisting the British forces. Nonetheless, the British troops reached Imphal on 22nd March, and on the same day, the Chief Commissioner proposed to hold a Durbar at the residence of the Political Agent. The Chief Commissioner planned to read out the order of the Government of India in the *Durbar* but the Durbar could not be held, and it was postponed to 23rd March, the next day. In fact, during these days there was a lot of rumour in Imphal that the Chief Commissioner would come to re-instate the Ex-Maharaja Surchandra Singh.⁹⁹ On 23rd March, Tikendrajit Singh refused to come to the Durbar on the ostensible ground of ill-health. As a result, Quinton decided to forcibly arrest Tikendrajit and on 24th March, two small columns of troops consisting of 30 and 70 sepoy under Lt. Brackenbury and Captain Butcher of Gorkha Rifle respectively were ordered to enter the fort and arrest Tikendrajit Singh. Lt. Luggard of the Gurkha Rifle was also sent with 50 men to support them.¹⁰⁰ However, Tikendrajit was not available at his house, and in the fighting that followed, 3 Gurkhas died and 14 others with Lt. Luggard were wounded. Lt. Brackenbury was also wounded, and subsequently he succumbed to his injuries. Throughout the whole day of the 24th March, there was heavy fighting between the Manipuri forces and the Britishers. Quinton, realising the

increasing pressure from the Manipuri Force tried to initiate negotiation with Kulachandra Singh. In the evening of 24th March, Quinton, along with four of his associates, went inside the fort for negotiation but they were killed there by a riotous crowd. The killing of the British officers was generally considered as a fulfilment of the popular prophesy that white men would be killed in front of *Kangla Sha*, the sacred symbol of the royal palace (Kangla Sha mamangda Angouba makok tagani). On hearing the news of the British disasters Lt. Grant of the Madras Infantry, who was then at Burma entered Manipur with 50 men. He was supported by Jamadar Nagarkatiya and 30 men of the Gurkha Rifle, which was posted in Langthabal, Manipur. On 24th April, the Force led by Grant, faced opposition from the Manipuri Force led by Major Yengkhoiba and Rajkumar Chingiensana. In the fight near Thoubal, Yaiskul Lakpa and Chingiensana died.¹⁰¹ However, the British Force could not enter Imphal. Meanwhile on 23rd March, the Government of India declared war on Manipur, and subsequently columns of troops were sent from Burma, Cachar and Kohima. The forces from Silcher and Burma were led by Major General Collet and Brigadier General T. Graham respectively. The Force from Kohima was confronted by Rajkumar Khurailakpa, with 1,000 men,¹⁰² whereas the British Force from Silchar was opposed by Rajkumar Kalasana and 1,000 sepoys.¹⁰³ In these battles the Manipuri forces were defeated by the Britishers. The biggest battle was fought at *Khongjom*, where many of the important Manipuri leaders like Major Paona and Rajkumar Chinglensana died. Ninety-seven Manipuri soldiers were also killed in the battle at *Khongjom*.¹⁰⁴ On 27th April, the Britishers occupied *Kangla*, the sacred royal palace at Imphal. Along with this the Manipuri leaders of the rebellion started to surrender. On 7th May, 1891 Thangal General surrendered, on 9th May, the regent Kulachandra Singh was captured and again on 23rd May, Senapati Tikendrajit was captured.¹⁰⁵

General H. Collet, Commanding Officer of Manipur Field Force, was instructed by the Government of India to put on

trial all persons suspected of murder or abetment of murder or of having acted as leaders or instigators of the revolt. Accordingly, the regent and his brothers were tried by a Court composed of the senior military officers aided by a civil officer with judicial experience. The other accused persons except the princes were tried by the Chief Political Officer. The Court awarded death sentence to regent Kulachandra Singh, Senapati Tikendrajit and Angou Singh for waging war against the Queen Empress.¹⁰⁶ The Governor General of India however commuted the death sentence of Kulachandra Singh to transportation of life on the ground that he was a man of sober character and was under the influence of Senapati Tikendrajit Singh. His private property was, however, forfeited. The sentence passed on Angou Singh was also commuted to transportation of life and forfeiture of property on the ground that there was no evidence that he abetted the murder of the British Officers. The death sentence passed on Tikendrajit was, however confirmed. The Chief Political Officer tried cases of 16 other accused persons including Thangal General, Kajao Manipuri, Niranjun Subedar, Samu Singh, Nilamani Singh, Major Miya Singh, Major, Lokendrabirjit Singh, Wangkheirakpa and 9 others. The death sentence passed on Thangal General was also confirmed on the ground that he had ordered the execution of the British officers.¹⁰⁷ Death sentences on Kajao Singh who murdered Mr. Grimwood and Nirangan Subedar (a former sepoy of the British army) who revolted against the British were also confirmed.¹⁰⁸ The other accused persons were sentenced to transportation of life along with the forfeiture of property.¹⁰⁹ Tikendrajit and Thangal were hanged on 13th August. Thus, the British authority dealt with the rebellious ruling group of Manipur with a heavy hand and the native state was brought under its control.

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7

EPILOGUE

The people of Manipur valley, as we have seen above, had been consistently struggling against the various exploitative socio-economic and religio-cultural policies of the feudal and colonial forces during the first half of the 20th century. The Rajkumars, whose former rights and powers had been considerably curbed by the socio-economic policies of the British administrators were always resentful to the new rulers and very often they participated and even led some of the popular movements against the local authority. It seems that the Rajkumars preferred for the restoration of the former pre-colonial socio-political system. Such a traditional and feudal out look of the Rajkumars was clearly reflected when they rarely participated in the people's struggle against the rampant socio-cultural oppressive system perpetrated by the King in collusion with the Brahmins. But, since the Rajkumars were exempted from many of the customary socio-religious obligations of the state, and also since the attempts of the King to re-assert the pre-colonial traditional order was what the nobles liked, they always gave tacit if not open support to the King.

Another significant aspect of the various popular movements were the active participation of the women folk of Manipur valley. In fact, in many of the movements, the participation of the women was much more then their male counterparts and in certain instances, they often took the

leadership. As late as 1983, the *Nupi-Samaj* (Women Organisation) of Manipur, with 25,000 members fought against — (i) Alcoholism, and (ii) military repression, the two most important social problems of Manipur in the 1970s and early 1980s.¹ The members of the Nupi Samaj, after a hard days work, roamed the streets of Imphal and the neighboring villages, with torches in their hands and confronted the excesses of the security forces who were trying to suppress the insurgency movement. These women would also attack and destroy all the local liquor vendors, and very often penalise the 'drunkards' with fines. The attempts of the women in those few years however, did not seem to produce any concrete results. Alcoholism is still rampant as before.

The active role of the women in the political movements of Manipur valley may be understood in the framework of the crucial role that they play in the society and economy of the state. The Manipuri women folk are indispensable social category in the functioning of the states economy, particularly in agriculture, trade, handicrafts and cottage industries. Although there is patriarchal system among the Meiteis the subordination of women to men are only in terms of their sex status in the family. Polygamy among men are frequent while polyandry is almost unknown. Even though the Meiteis are Vaishnavite Hindus, Vaishnav ideology could not penetrate deeper and as a result, many elements of Hinduism like inferior position of women, child marriage, sati purdah, etc. which are prevalent in many other parts of Hindu society are not found in Manipur. It could also be pointed out that some of the characteristics of an earlier form of social structure, in which men and women had equal rights seem to be still prevalent in the 20th century Meitei society.

The third important aspect of the popular movements during the colonial period was the emergence of an educated middle class. The middle class became a recognisable social groups in Manipur in the 1930s. Since the limited politico - Administration structure could not satisfy the aspirations of the group, they became quite alienated and subsequently started leading various popular movements of the masses. In particular, they fought against the socio-religious

oppression of the King and the Brahmins because, the colonial policy of indirect rule made them feel that their main enemy was the king and his allies. It was because of such a peculiar contradiction in Manipur that when there was a strong Nationalist movement in all the parts of the country, the middle class turned against the King. During the Nupilaan, when most of the people in Manipur turned against the local authority and their lackeys, the Marwari traders, a section of the middle class did not support the movement rather, they sabotaged the agitation by allying with the Marwaris and the state authorities. Their opportunism has been more or less reflected in the entire period of the study.

In the post Second World War period, the position of the middle class was strengthened. During the War, when the Marwaris fled from Manipur, the middle class monopolised the war time economy, and consolidated their positions in the society. After the war, they formed the State Congress and started demanding the introduction of responsible form of Government. Their demand was however limited to the level of their sectional interests. That was the precise reason of why they allied with the local government in the formation of the Constitution Making Committee. The Committee was formed with no proper election or no proper representation from different communities of the state. In August 1947, when the Govt. formed the interim Manipur State Council in collusion with a group of Congress leaders, the State Congress was split on the issue of division of posts and powers. 'Tompok Congress' and 'Tomal Congress' should be understood in this framework because there was no ideological differences between the two groups. In 1948, when the Maharaja of Manipur, announced to hold the election of the Legislative Assembly with universal franchise, under the new constitution, the two Congress factions merged into one unit and attempted to win the election. However, when the State Congress could not form the Government, the group led by Tompok Singh, supported the idea of 'Poorvanchal Pradesh' on their main aim was to destabilise the Government so that they could again try to come in power. On the other hand the Tomal faction opposed the

move because they were still in the Government and they were on the look out for every possible means to retain their position in the Government. However, when the Government was formed by Praja Shanti Party, in alliance with the Hill members and the Krishak Shabha, the two Congress factions again united in their demand for the merger of the state into Indian Union. It has already been seen that, the Praja Shanti Party and the hill M.L.As., who were also in the power, opposed the move. They certainly did not like a change in the then existing power structure. The King of Manipur also not in favour of the merger because it would mean an erosion on his powers and authority in the state. However, when merger became impending the King signed the merger agreement, and he insisted the Governor of Assam to increase the amount of his privy purse.

In contrast to the politics of the elitist State Congress, Irabot Singh and his followers mobilised the masses under the banner of Praja Sangha and Krishak Shabha for the basic socio-economic and political rights of the masses . Even after the Britishers left, the condition of the people was not qualitatively different. Irabot knew that, there was no future for the people of Manipur either under the Maharaja or the elitist state congress. He established the District Organising Committee of the Communist Party of India, and under its directions planned to launch an armed socialist revolution. However, the movement was suppressed by the powerful Indian Army in collusion with the native elite.

Thus, our study should make it clear that the developments in Manipur valley were, in certain respects - conceptually as well as manifestly similar to such developments in colonial situations elsewhere. But there were certain traits, trends and tendencies typical to Manipur - rooted in the historical growth of the valley.

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