

060860

MANIPUR PAST AND PRESENT

The Ordeals and Heritage of
a Civilisation

VOLUME III
(Nagas & Kuki-Chins)

Edited by
Naorem Sanajaoba
(1995)

954117
Sam/Mdm
060860



MITTAL PUBLICATIONS
NEW DELHI-110059 (INDIA)

The Roots

Naorem Sanajaoba

South East Asian Personality

The Tibeto-Burman or Sino-Tibetan speaking Meeteis, Nagas and Kuki-Chins of Manipur, which is a continuation of an early nation-state in South East Asia, represent a unique South East Asian personality through the ages since the paleolithic period till contemporary epoch. The ethnoses who led the first human dispersal from the Choukoutien and other caves passed through Tibeto-Chinese transborder areas, the Yunan table land through a number of routes in both the northern and the southern directions and opened up the chapter of the first human settlement in upland caves in the present Manipur. The autochthones had their roots in the virgin soil, descended down the lowlands and, rendered the proto-history only to be followed by the historical times, which in its turn, witnessed a series of ambient conflicts, wars, migrations, devastations, catastrophes, and a complete unfolding of the spectacular human drama, besides the interspersed golden days. Crisis after crisis characterised the life of Meeteis, Nagas and Kuki-Chins in the course of their performances in history. Historical sciences do testify few axioms, as a retrospective reconstruction of the past is a matter of prospective acceptance and validity and it is based on complete and incomplete evidences that invite many ways of interpretation and polemic; however, some relics and some vocabulary of the past are always available for the present assessment. South East Asian personality is very much evident in the indigenous people of Manipur.

The present tri-ethnic state of Manipur lies in latitude range 23.92°-25.79° and longitude range 92.97°-94.75°. With Nagaland to the north, Assam to the west, Mizoram to the South, it has international boundary to the East. At one time in history the river Chindwin in Myanmar formed Manipur's natural eastern frontier and the Kabaw valley remained a disputed territory of two countries Manipur and Burma (Myanmar) till Indian take over of Manipur in 1949. The eastern international boundary has several interesting features. Nagas settle in Myanmar-Arunachal Pradesh transborder area, Sagaing division of Kachin state, Somra tract in between Manipur and Nagaland. Kuki-

Chin settlements are also found in the transborder areas to the south of Somra tract, and northern part of Chin State of Myanmar. The eastern frontier of Manipur along with a part of its northern boundary had been the pre-historic and proto-historic corridor of early human dispersal and subsequent migrations in the process of consolidation of the indigenous people of Manipur.

The westerners in trickles also joined Manipur mainstream at the late historical period. The existing boundary of Manipur had remained as such without dislocation for more than a century. The issue relating to Kabaw valley remained a matter of public importance during the regime of Maharajah Churachand and Maharajah Bodhachandra, as they consistently viewed Kabaw valley as a disputed territory of Manipur, since the Burmese government continuously paid annual revenues from the early nineteenth century till the mid twentieth century to the concerned government as per the provisions of the 1834 Treaty. The payment of the revenue to Manipur had to discontinue only after the reversion of the Kabaw valley to Manipur. Neither the reversion nor the payment of revenue for the occupation of the valley by the Myanmar government had occurred in the recent past.

In historical times, the boundary of Manipur fluctuated across the existing national and international boundaries, as Manipur happened to be a force to be reckoned with in this part of South East Asia. Henry Yule's map indicates Manipur of 1500 A.D. and 1580 A.D. with a larger territory to its south and eastern frontier beyond the Chindwin deep in Burmese territory. In spite of periodic fluctuations, the Manipur territory and boundary remains considerably stable and nearly unaltered for at least half a millennium in the recent past. This stability deserves notice in the context of significant territorial re-alignments that took place in Asia, specially in the South East Asia.

Manipur, known by as many as twenty two nomenclatures in the past lies in an important junction of the Continental drift. Its territory spreads over where the Indian plate joins the Asian landmass, to the south of which is located the controversial relics of Gondwanaland in the form of Java and Borneo, among others.

The current geological science considers the formation of Himalayas not earlier than sixty million years before the present (BP). The archaeologists believe that Manipur rose from the sea level before fifty million years and the Manipur valley had become dry in the last eight thousand years, although several places remained damp for some centuries. Archaeological surveys conducted since 1935 till date have indicated that the first evidence of Pleistocene man could be seen in Khankhui cave¹ of Manipur. Stone age culture had been explored in Khangkhui, Wangu, Shengbu, Machi, Kheithelmanbi east, Mongjam and Chakpikarong. These cultures had been found to be comparable to those of Choukhoushien in China and Hoanbinhian in Vietnam. The

Pithencanthropus and Sinanthropus had their home in Asia, although African and Siwalik findings enlarge the Asian and the African home of the first man. China and South East Asia is therefore, the pre-historical umbilical link of the indigenous Meeteis, Nagas and Kuki-Chins of Manipur, whereas the melting pot explains the late historical process, which absorbed small strains the trickles from Bharat (Hindusthan).

The Choukoutien hominids of China² had used striking colours, forms and feathers as much as the Nagas the other tribes do even today. The Chinese forbears initiated rice cultivation, domestication of dog and pig in 4th to 3rd millennia B.C. The Hoangho basin happened to be the first cradle of the hominids. Academia Sinica started archaeological excavations in China since 1928. Excavations had been done in Thailand and Vietnam in 1950, in Burma in 1960, in Yunan in 1965 and in Manipur in 1935, 1978 to 1992. These South East Asian results bear far reaching importance in the pre-historical reconstruction of the past of South East Asia through the modern techniques of archaeology and other techniques, which are yet to be developed in a multi-disciplinary context.

The historical, geological, geographical, archaeological, anthropological, philological and other social sciences can pool together their collective know-how and state-of-the-art techniques in order to measure the different dimensions of the South East Asian personality. Biological and genetical sciences too are found to be indispensable besides the services of the paleontologists. The cradle of mankind is as much mysterious as the unravelled secrets of nature. It will be rather a remote hypothesis to shift Manipur's umbilical Asian link to the population dispersal from the western Asia and middle east, as it had been prevented from penetration because of the geographical reliefs in Assam, Nagaland and Manipur hills. Archaeologists and historical scientists start looking towards Choukoutien and Hoanbinhian in the study of the caveman and indigenous people of Manipur rather than peeping at Siwaliks, the Neanderthals and Africa. Besides the Choukoutien, excavations had been made in thousands of sites in China. Five lakh years old pre-historic settlements with traces of use of fire have been found in Dragon Bone hill near Choukoutien.⁴ Yuanmou man of early pleistocene have been found in the 1965 Yunan excavation. Forty thousands years old Lieuchiang man have also been located in Kwanshi region of China. South western Neolithic culture have been found in Yunan.⁵

1950 excavations⁶ in Thailand and Vietnam have explored pebble tool cultures at Mae Tha and Mae Mo, Song, Rong Kwang; Lower Paleolithic pebble tool culture of Lanna Thai, which could have been 750,000 - 1,000,000 years old BP, has been found to be comparable to that of its Indonesian counterpart.⁷ Eugene Duboi had the celebrated

discovery of *Pithecanthropus* in Indonesia in as early as 1891. Pre-Chinese indigenous culture thrived in Vietnam; the Hoa Binh culture has been attributed to Paleolithic and Neolithic period. In pre-historic times as well as pro-historical stage, population movement passed through present Guangxi and Yunan provinces of China before it reached Manipur and the adjoining states. Copper and iron objects of Bronze age had been found in Yunan. The archaeologist observes that there is affinity between the Neolithic culture of Guangxi and the Hoabinhin and Basconian culture of Vietnam.⁸ Post 1970 Manipur excavations has led to the inference that Hoanbinhian culture also existed in Manipur sites. The archaeological linkage of pre-historic Manipur with the cradle of mankind on the one hand and with the South East Asian pre-history on the other hand has been fairly established.

Georges Coedes had enunciated proven matrices of South East Asian personality. These matrices nearly fit into these of the indigenous people of Manipur. Historiography in wider sense has been at cross-roads in Manipur for fairly long time, since the dominant and institutional scholarship had given, in unmistakable terms, a message that the Manipuris had their ancestry in the far off middle east and Western Asia. Certain nominal Aryan strains are undeniably found in Manipur population; however, the dominant race is Mongolian, intermixed with Australoid and Austric racial infrastructure. The parameters of Southern Mongoloid characterise the indigenous Manipuris and the ethnoses of Manipur. One of the evidence is that every Meetei or Naga or Kuki-Chin infant would have a blue patch birth-mark of Mongolian origin at its buttock. This evidence would be missing in other population groups having a different racial heritage.

The Pareoans (Southern Mongoloid) had migrated from Tibet and high plateaus of South West China⁹, had a Southern drift even in historical times. Besides, the Pareoans, Proto-Malays or Deutero Malays constituted the indigenous people of South East Asia. There is a strong Thai element in South China and in Manipur populace, as is corroborated by evidences. Charles A. Fisher has found that the present hill peoples—the Nagas, Chins, Kachins, Karens, among others, had been progeny of early Mongoloid invaders from the north.¹⁰ He notes that the Thais had migrated from present Chinese provinces of Kwantung and Kwansi. It is widely accepted that the Thais had settled in Nanchao, Yunan and Szechuan before they made large scale migrations in South East Asia, through several waves in the early and medieval past. The indigenous people of Manipur speak Tibeto Burman and Sino-Tibetan languages, which also had been influenced by Indo-China heritage.

Several early foreign accounts¹¹ had endorsed that human settlements took place in Manipur and adjoining states in early times. The Meetei literacy accounts like 'Leishemlol', 'Chakpron' and other puyas furnish the details of the settlements of autochthones - the 'Chakpas'

in Manipur. M. Kirti notes that the old Chakpas who settled in Andro, Shekmaikhunbi, Chairel and Leimram, among others, had been the first Meetei autochthones, who preceded the new Chakpas who are also indigenous Meetei, but they had migrated in early Christian era along with Poireiton, possibly from upper Burma - Tibeto-Chinese frontier. Chakpas had been the first autochthones of Manipur, whereas the Caveman in Manipur hills could have dispersed in all habitable places. The ethnicisation of Meetei, Naga and Kuki-Chin is rather a later proto historical process. The Meetei puyas and chronicles furnish the pre-ethnicisation stage elaborately.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji has corroborated the South East Asian origin of the indigenous people of Manipur. In Vedic as well as pre-historic times¹², the Mongoloid Kiratas settled in the region comprising of Manipur. The Monoloids had absorbed the early Austrics in Burma and Indo-China¹³. The Kiratas spread over as far as Western Rajasthan and Jodhpur alone has as many as twenty seven temples of Kiradu city.¹⁴ The Meetei musical instrument 'Pena' has its counterpart in Jodhpur and other areas of Rajasthan. Mongolian cultures comparable to those found in Manipur are also found in Himalayan belts like Ladakh. 1993 Ladakh excavation explored paleolithic civilization and Buddhist relics in Ladakh.

Cultural Relics

The indigenous people of Manipur have unmistakable common traits and cultural affinities with the South East Asian personality and the Sinic matrices. The cultural pluralism of the medieval past and contemporary proselytization can not totally wipe out certain positive transmitted and acquired cultural image of the past, to which the Manipuris belonged at several points of time. The living evidences give testimony to such behavioural and cultural structures of South East Asia. 'Cathay' is the ancient name of China. The Burmese call the Meeteis Kathe and the Shans call Meeteis as Cassay. The Shans are Tais who are the ethnic cousins of the Meeteis, Nagas and Kuki-Chins. It is possible that at certain point of time, some of the ethnic groups could have perceived the Manipuris as Chinese elements or, people of Tibeto-Chinese background. The royal chronicle-'Cheitharol Kumbaba' of Manipur records the names of Meetei kings, officials, and important individuals. All the early and medieval personal names bear Tibeto-Burman, Tai, Sinic or South East Asian characters. The Nagas, the Kuki-Chins and the Meeteis differ very little in this context till the 18th century proselytisation widened the cultural relation between and among the indigenous people of Manipur. Sanskritization of the lowland people and Christianisation of the highlanders had sharpened the ethnicisation process, although the roots remain the same despite cultural pluralism.

Naga intellectuals¹⁵ observe that Indonesians, Igorot tribes of Philippines, tribes of Sumatra and Burma use the implements and weapons

used by the Nagas. Head hunting practised by Nagas and other tribes have been practised by tribes in upper Burma, and was tribe in lower Burma. Chinese accounts record that the Shang society of the second millennium B.C. practised head hunting as well as military expedition. The Nagas and tribes perform the head hunting in the military expedition too. In Bronze age Chins, the head of the chief of Jen tribe was offered to the ancestor of Yi tribe. In the Moirang legend of the Meeteis, Puremba offered his head for decapitation before his bosom friend Moirang Thonglen, who promised to execute whoever had wrongly sounded the drum in Moirang Kangla. Meeteis like the Nagas at certain point of time practised 'Lukha Thaba', the deputation of the enemy's head. The head hunting institution characterised an important index of the Naga and other cognate tribes of China. At this stage of human civilization, head hunting is obsolete and irrelevant.

Miti Naga
Similarity

D. G. E. Hall¹⁶ writes that Dwattabaung, the first king in Prome city of Burma married in the pre-Christian era a Naga princess and that the Ai-lao people of the pre-Christian time had ears with wide openings to bear loads. The Nagas too did the same not so long ago even in the middle of the 20th century. Gangmumei Kabui writes that Nagas settled in Trans-Chindwin region and that some Kuki tribes migrated to Manipur in pre-historic times. The Meeteis, the Nagas and the Kuki-Chins remained autochthones in pre-historic times. Several Chinese tribes were used to shifting cultivation like the Kuki-Chins of Manipur. Form of dry and wet rice cultivation as well as shifting cultivation are some of the traditional agricultural practices, followed by the respective ethnoses from early period till today. The Thais followed wet, lowland rice cultivation and so did the Meeteis. The settlement pattern also had been determined by these usages in agricultural practices. Meetei and tribal burial customs had been followed in the great Funan civilization¹⁸, Thailand¹⁹ and China²⁰. As many as four customs of the ritual of the death had been followed in both Funan and the early Meetei society. The author on his own had physically seen in Bangkok enormous similarities between the Thais and the Meeteis including their BTF pattern and temperament. The Meetei house had 'Kai' and even the royal palace had erected 'Kai' which had been a common norm for the Thai constructions. Actually, the Thais (Tais) had played a dominant role, sometimes aggressive postures in the history of South East Asia. The proto-Thais had originated from the Chinese stock which had been multifarious and varied in historical times.

Miti Naga

A scholar from Mongolia had visited Manipur and pronounced the impeccable cultural similarities between the Mongoloid and Mongolian populace of Manipur. O. Nayamdavaz²¹ has noted that the Sakas (Acythians) of South Mongolia would have reached Manipur and that the wrestling style 'Bouch' in Mongolia is similar to Meetei 'Mukna'. Nayamadavaz writes that Mongolian 'Morin Huur' is similar to Meetei

Miti Naga

'Pena'. The long songs like 'Moirang parva', Love marriage of Manipur, use of rice beer etc. had been followed in Mongolia. Mongolian people from places in between Gobi desert and Tibetan plateau migrated to Manipur and adjoining areas in prehistoric times and even today, Mongolian presence in Central Asia is very strong.

The Meetei practice of writing 'Larei Lathup' or the secret history and accounts had been equally practised in Mongolia which had secret history.²¹ The Great Mongolian Chinghiz Khan (Khan is not a Muslim surname), the like of whom had never been born in human history, found a place in Mongolian secret history. He was anti-racialist, secular, non-discriminatory and above all, democratic within his ruling clan, although he had no scruples in conquering the world including the west by sword. The secret history²² recorded that he was unsympathetic to his son Jochi, whose mother had been a captive of Merkit Khan. Very few races maintain secret history save the great Mongols and the Meeteis, who maintained 'Larei Lathup' of several kings against the wishes and order of the king. Besides, the Tais (the Ahoms in Assam) and the Meeteis had followed age-old practice of writing royal chronicles, unlike several ruling ethnoses in several places. The Nagas feel that they had certain scripts which look like the Meetei scripts, but they had lost any touch with them long time back.

The early Chinese²³ and Meetei have many a common social tradition like digging tunnels surrounding the house, boat race, copying of scriptures, and the 20 days compulsory military service which the Meeteis call 'Lallup Kaba', among others. In descriptive and cultural context, the shooting down of the 'Sun' is a unique legend of the Chinese and the Meeteis. The philosophy would have been different. Bai Shouyi's edited work, 'An Outline History of China' mentions that one Mr. Yi shot down nine suns out of ten in the sky leaving only one.²⁴ In 'Numit Kappa', Khwai Nongchempam Piba of the pre-Pakhangba period had shot down one of the two suns in the sky, the allegorical hint had however been given in the context of executing the brother of the Kanglei king. Shooting the sun remains in the ethnic memory of the Meeteis. Snake patterns or motives had been found in Meetei 'Phaphals' as well as Tali (Nanchao) designs of snake-like monsters.²⁵ The dragon motive is widely found in Burma and Meetei structures. In 1891, the British had blasted the two dragons which decorated the gate to the royal palace. Extensive cultural traits and structures have also been found to be common in between the Tibetans and the Indigenous people of Manipur. The linguistic and tonal similarities and common folk traditions further corroborate the early nexus between all the South East Asians.

The Manipur Autochthones

The ethnic components of the autochthonous Proto-Meeteis, Proto-Nagas and Proto-Kuki-Chins had been Pareoceans and Proto-Malays, who in pre-historic times left their cave shelters, passed through Tibeto-

Chinese-Myanmar transborders and settled for the first time in the highlands and later in the lowlands of the present Manipur. The Paleolithic Backsonian-Hoabinhian and similar contemporary South East Asian cultures created appropriate conditions for the settlement of the autochthones in Manipur. The old Chakpas settled in the valley, the Nagas and Kuki-Chins settled in the hills.

Poireiton's migration and settlement in the pre-Christian or early Christian era had been considered to be significant. Late Moirangthem Chandrasing²⁶ wrote that Poireiton migrated from the Burmese side after emerging out of a cave, possibly the netherlands passed through Kabaw, Tumu, Langmaiching hills, areas of Tangkhul, Maring, Tarao, Anal, Karong and reached Koubru hills. He was in search of a place, where man could remain immortal. It was definite that Poireiton had witnessed mass massacres which resulted from ethnic clashes while in Burma or the transborder areas in the Tibeto-Chinese region and he wanted to peacefully settle in safer places, where slaughters would not happen. Poireiton Khunthok narrates the pains and agony, he and his folks suffered while in the journey.

The Tibeto-Burman speaking ethnoses²⁷ had their earliest home in Kansu and adjoining places in between North Eastern Tibet and Gobi desert. People fled to the south as Chinese rulers of T'Sin pushed them out in the first millennia B.C. Tibet became a great power in the 7th century A.D. as its writ ran over portions of China and Nepal and it²⁸ became the greatest military power in the continent of Asia. Polo was played in Tibet and it is one of the traditional game of Manipur. Tibetans and Meeteis have several common traits.

Yunan, Szechuan, and Guangxi are Chinese provinces where the Thais settled. Waves of people moved, passed through and migrated from these places to Manipur and other South East Asian areas. At present, Yunan has as many as twenty two nationalities and in 1949 post-liberation period, 260 ethnic groups had been registered in Yunan.²⁹ Yunan remained a hostile kingdom to China for fifteen centuries before the Mongol conquest. In Yunan³⁰, the stronger people took up rice growing in the valleys and the weaker did slash and burn in the hills. This pattern has implications in the ethnicisation process in Manipur in the early period. The stronger always has a choice and the weaker is left with no other than Hobson's choice. In either 777 A.D. or 1220 A.D. the Tai leader Shamlongpha entered in Manipur. The latter year is considered to be reliable. The legendary mass migration of the Tai (Thai) people towards the south took place in the 13th century. W. Ibohah Singh³¹ writes that Thai migration took place from the 3rd century B. C. due to the pressure of the Chinese emperor.

Proto-Thai race ruled in the state of Ch'u in the 9th century B.C.,³² Proto-Thai Ch'u and two more states of Chin and Ch'n dominated the Chinese scene for a long time. Proto-Tibetan leader Fuchien ruled the

Tibet-Manipur
Proto

QTHH
valley
mountain
poor
valley

entire north from 357 to 385 A.D.³³ Proto-Tibetans Mu-jung, Ti and Chiang joined the race for northern supremacy. The ancestors of the indigenous people of Manipur had rich experience in military culture, dominance and administration, although they contended among themselves for upmanship. The story of Nanchao has relevance to the Manipur people. Nanchao was a Tai (Thai) civilization like the Funan civilization, both of which broke up at a later stage. Nanchao came into prominence in the 8th century A.D. Its rise led to the decline of Cambodia, Pyu kingdom and fragmentation of the Khmer empire. When China was divided into North and South, Yunan witnessed tribal turbulence³⁵. This would have led to the migration of several tribes in the second wave in transborder Manipur. Tai Ko-lo-feng's invasion of Burma³⁶ and occupation of the upper Irrawady valley which was very fertile in 757 A.D. might have accelerated the population push in directions of weaker resistance like Manipur and adjoining areas. Head hunting tribes settled in places between Burma and Yunan. Many of them had been pushed out to Manipur.

DGE Hall³⁷ writes that Ko-lo-feng campaign doomed Burma and reached Manipur borders. Pyu people in the Pyu kingdom who had been Tibeto-Burman speakers might have reached Manipur, as they disappeared from the scene. It may be noted that several tribes had rushed into Manipur-Burma transborder areas in 1824, as a result of Burmese conquest of the Arakkan in which four to five lakh people had lost lives. Southern Burma pushed out people in waves to its neighbour from early period till today. The proto-Thais too expanded in all places of South East Asia as far as Indonesia. They migrated back to form a Thai state 'Sukhothai' in 1238 A.D. in the present territory of Thailand (erstwhile Siam). The Thais honour their king as God king (Devargi) in the same way as the Meeteis respect their king as God King (Laiyingthou). They called their land as land of Gold as much as the Meeteis call their country as land of Gold (Sana=Gold, Leipak=country). Ethnic memory of the past has not been entirely lost.

The Mongol invasion and Sinic push are significant factors in the population transfer in early days. Upper Assam-China land route had been opened in as early as 128 B.C., centuries before the Mongol invasion in the 13th century A.D. The rise and fall of great powers, warring states, unending ethnic strifes and regional consolidations had been largely responsible for the dispersal of human populations in South East Asia. Manipur was very much within the fall out zone in both the pre-Christian era and the subsequent period till the Mongol invasion. Proto-history and historical consolidations had been almost complete in Manipur during this eventful period. The event analysis of the transborder areas and effective zones are indispensable for reconstructing the past of Manipur.

The trend in the pre-Christian era was represented by the warring Chinese states, upheavals followed by Hun military expeditions and Han colonisation of Kansu, as a result of which the Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples ventured their exodus. The post-Christian period witnessed the emergence of Han world power comparable to the American power in this age, occurrence of great flood, great famine epidemics and eventual disintegration of the mighty Han empire. The barbarians (nomads actually non-barbarians) led by the Mongols and Turks flexed their muscles all over the north. The Nanchao Thai power and Tibetan power rose up in the event horizon as the Hans retreated from historical limelight. The mighty Mongols then conquered the world and swept away all the then existing powers to shades and reigned supreme thereby reducing all the great conquerors of the world to diminutives. The forlorn indigenous people of Manipur are progeny of the world conquerors and successive world powers of the past, despite the changes in history and their present day conditions.

The major events³⁸ were the ethnic strife in 5th century B.C., which might have been the event the Meetei puyas call as the 'pralaya' or devastation, the skirmishes of the warring states till the third century B.C., Hun militancy, endless military expeditions of the first emperor of China Ch'in Shihhuangti, who constructed the great wall in 200 B.C., Vietnam wars in 214-111 B.C., Han colonisation of Kansu area in 121-119 B.C., massacre of lakhs of Vietnam people in 44 A.D., massacre of 2 lakh of Xiangnu (Hun) in 89 A.D. and opening of routes from China to India (Shentu) in 120 A.D.

The Imperial China witnessed spectacular events like the rise of Han as world power in second century A.D., great flood in 153 A.D., decline of Han power, nomadic invasion from the north and west in third century A.D. (Mongols and Turks), control of North China by Qin kingdom, set up by Tai in 351 A.D. Turkish invasion in 625 A.D., and Mongol conquests in 12-13 century A.D.

R. Brown wrote that⁴⁰ the southern hill tribes of Manipur had their migration from the north, but the Khongjais (Kuki-Chins) trace their origin to places twenty days south of Manipur valley. The Boros and Hung people (sic. Hun) might have settled in Koubru hills of Manipur.⁴¹ Nagas are said to have migrated from Tibet and Nepal, Mon-Khmer, Yunan and Burma.⁴² W. Ibohal⁴³ writes that Tangkhuls (Yakka tribe) migrated from south eastern Tibet and Mao-Maram from Teru state and Kabuis from Kachin-Karen areas. The contemporary historical sciences as developed so far in Manipur corroborate the thesis of the South East Asian origin of the autochthones. Periodization remains largely within the province of speculations and subjective personal assessments. A broad pattern is however, emerging in the context of the events that had been described above. The Malaya group was predominant in Malayasia and Philippines till the Thais dominated the

Khmer, the Malaya, and other ethnic groups in the oceanic and the southern mainland.

Ethnogenesis and Ethnossimilation

The Meeteis, the Nagas and the Kuki-Chins had inbuilt affinities in the course of the ethnogenetic process. The literary, folk, oral sources, BTF pattern and living pieces of evidence demonstrate their ethnogenesis. George Watt⁴⁴ noted that the Manipuris (Meeteis) appeared to be a mixed race between Kukis and Nagas. In the living folk traditions of the Meeteis, Nagas and Kukis, they are said to be brothers, although the interpolations differ. The old Kuki-Chins had been a part of early Meetei folk traditions and the Nagas have also been a component throughout. In historic times, the tribes and principalities of the Meeteis had amalgamated themselves through conquest and other arrangements into a fullfledged nationhood, equipped with a centralised administration, market and cultural complex and external relations with neighbours. The Naga villages, however, remained as autonomous units. Sections of the Kuki-Chins were always on the move from one place to another following their interest in shifting cultivations. Pluralism had, therefore, become a socio-economic and political exercise within the stable territorial framework of Manipur. The integrative process of the ethnoses still continues.

The pre-history of Manipur had been divided into four major epochs known as Chaks, the periodization about which varies in several ways. A survey of Meetei Puyas or literary sources reveals that in pre-historic Chakpa era, sixty to seventy tribes settled in Manipur hills and after the reign of King Tari in Chak period, the Khabas transformed into Khamran, Tangpa into Tangkhul and Chakot into Chakothao. The survey indicates that Meetei yeksalai (clan formation) emerged out of the fusion of the existing hillmen and the migrants from the South East Asia. The Meetei ancestors lived on the hills till the valley dried up. Late Oinam Bhogeswor⁴⁶ cites the names of Manipuri autochthones as mentioned in 'Numit Kappa' viz., Chakpa, Shelloi-Langmai, Maring tribe (supposed to be the oldest hill tribe) and Thongnang (possibly the Boros).

The Leithak Leikharon⁴⁷ describes that in mythology, Wahang Chantou, Thikleng and Marong innovated the hills while Chakmaringpa, Taomaringpa, Ukonglen reconstructed the valley. It also described that several Meetei families and the hill people were the same. In the time of Poireiton Khuntok⁴⁸, metal tools had been used, people weaved Haophi (clothes of hill tribes) and people with slanted eyes (Chinese feature) remained. Seven clan system of the Meeteis⁴⁹ (Yektaret) had also been found to have existed in the ethnic structures of the hill tribes viz., Tangkhul, Maring, Kabui, Koireng, Anal, Chothe-Kom and Moyon-Monsang, among others. The Chirus and Mao-Marams too might have similar structures. Naoria Phullo⁵⁰, however, observed that

the Meeteis and the hill tribes might have different origins. He admitted that through the exogamous marriage, the hill people and the Meeteis later on became one people.

The ethnogenesis of the Manipuri autochthones has interesting accounts. Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra, on my personal enquiry expresses his hesitation to publish the manuscript of 'Keithi Keikoi Keiphat' puya, which describes the list of Meetei surnames of families which had been direct converts from Chingmee (hill men), several of whom purportedly claim to be the progeny of high caste Aryan Hindus from Bharatbarsha without any reliable evidence whatsoever. The unpublished puya describes the conversion of Meeteis into Chingmee and vice-versa. Reportedly, some of the hillmen made secret visits to Meetei families to discuss their family and clan problems in the recent past. Even ordinary common sense would immediately convince any outsider that the apparent difference that had been made out to prevail in between Meeteis and Naga-Kukis is non-existent except on the cultural level. Intruders from foreign lands induced the powers that be in the recent past to make a schism in between the people of the hills and the valley in the same way as sectarianism is creating rifts between the original ethnoses of Manipur.

Tangkhuls claimed Haobam Marak in Imphal city as their original place, Marings from Leishangkhong and Heirok hills.⁵¹ It has been reported that Mao- Nagas believed Kukis and Nagas as children of Mamo and Meetei as the child of Tuto; Mamo and Tuto had been the children of a divinity called 'Asu'.⁵² Chirus believed that Meeteis, Nagas and Kukis had been brothers of the same parents. This belief is equally shared by the Thadous and Kukis (Khongjais) and also by the Tangkhuls. These oral traditions point to a common ancestry of the indigenous peoples. M. McCulloh wrote in 1859 about the common linguistic origin⁵³ of the Kukis and Meeteis. G. A. Grierson had confirmed this proposition and brought Naga, Kuki-Chins and Meeteis (Manipuris) within the same linguistic family in his majestic work—*the Linguistic Survey of India*. In this context, Meeteis, Nagas and Kukis constitute the same and single ethnic entity, despite the separate development process and pace of growth.

Hmar and old Kuki-Chins migrated in waves from lowlands (Patal) in the South of Manipur by following the course of Sugnu river.⁵⁴ Later the new Moirangs, Simte, Paite and Gangte followed the wave. Prince Wangbren married Anal woman. Verrier Elwin⁵⁵ noted that Maring—the oldest tribe—were close to the Burmese Shans (Tai people) and the Kukis migrated from Upper Chittagong hill tracts.

Early Meetei literary sources describe the ethnogenesis elaborately. Nine groups of people⁵⁶ settled in early times: they were: Sarang-Leishang, Haorok Konthou, Urok-Ushai, Tahngga Kambong, Ningjal-Laitol, Khumphak-Jingjeng, Lera-Khongnang, Lokkha-Haokha and

Heirein-Khunjan. The peoples in the hills and plain had a common ancestry. Late Moirangthem Chandrasing wrote⁵⁷ about the ethnicisation of the Boros, Kabaw, Tangkhul, Tarau, Kabui and about those who migrated to Mayangleibak after taking the betel nuts. Poireiton Khunthok describes the pottery and neolithic culture of the Chakpas. Yaima Singh⁵⁸ has documented in 'Poireiton Khunthokpa' that some people lived in Kabaw village as dependents ('Tangduna Leiramee' = lived as dependent) of the hillmen and they had been henceforth known as Tangkhuls. The source describes the ethnic crystallisation of hill people and the Meeteis, and the reason behind naming the Marams and Anals. Tangkhul figures in Panthoibi Khongkul.⁵⁹ Even today, in Meetei Laihar aoba (sylvan deity festivals) which is regarded as the earliest Meetei religious function. Tangkhul plays an inseparable component of the early Meetei life. Some scholars would even equate Tangkhuls with Meeteis in the ethnogenesis. It could be an interpolation though.

The early population group—Chakmaringba—had seven branches, of which Meetei had been one.⁶⁰ In the genealogy of King Kangba, Lamlekshang ascended to the hills to become hill people and Nungou Yumthangpa remained as Leishangthem.⁶¹ Mangthoi Thamei (sic. if one alternates Thai and Mei here, is simply becomes Meithai=Meitei; this is being done in Vietnam also like Nam-veit) wrote⁶² that the early common ancestor had seven sons viz., Thanggraba, Chakkraba, Kabuiru Shallamba, Traoba, Khramba, Thebacha and Poireiton. All the six brothers save Poireiton and settled in the Manipur hills. He cites 'Keithi Keikoi Keiphat' puya of the Meeteis in describing how the hill tribes converted themselves into Konthoujam, Shougaijam, Shanasam, Khaidem, Nandeibam and Sinam⁶³ surnames of the Meeteis, just to cite a few.

M. Kirti wrote⁶⁴ that Angom ancestors—Pureiromba and Chingsomba—emerged from Khangkhui and Kasom site of Tangkhul Nagas, the Moirang Thanjing descended from hills to become the first king of Moirang and that Khabi, the son of Meetei king Kangba converted to Khongjai (Kuki-Chin). The old Kuki-Chins Chothe, Anal and Purum had been the relatives of Sanamahi and Pakhangba of the Meeteis. 'Chakpakhunda Khunthoklon' puya⁶⁵ narrates as to how the Khaba-Nganba clan of the Meeteis had been assimilated to Meetei ruling clan and how some of them transformed into Tangkhul, Kabui and Angom. N. Khelchandra writes that the Leishangthem and Kabui had been immediate brothers. He also writes that sections of 'Khaba' became Kabui, Tangkhul, Mahoulontai, and Angom.

After a survey of early Meetei chronicles, N. Birachandra⁶⁷ describes how the Urok Usha became the Tangkhuls, Luwang salai migrated from Yunan and Herem Khunja settled in Kiri hills. More and more corroborative literary evidences are pouring in, although some of the sensitive puyas like 'Keithi Keikoi Keiphat' puya are yet to be published by the custodians of the Meetei chronicles.

Ethnogenesis matured into ethnossimilation process at one point of time, but sharpened ethnicisation replaced the assimilation phenomenon with the multidimensional cultural developments and evolutions of the ethnoses in the medieval period. A grid of early common polity of the ethnoses existed. The hillmen and the plain people participated on equal terms in the coronation of the Manipur king Pakhangba.⁶⁸ The common gathering of the peoples of the hills and plain, their friendship, collective exercises are mentioned in Numit Kappa Puya.⁶⁹ King Sameirang married a woman of the Maring tribe⁷⁰. Wangbren married an Anal woman in the past.

The successful consolidation of seven independent principalities and subsequent formation of a centralised Meeteileipak a central administration and nation-state formation favoured the Meeteis to emerge as *Herrenvolk* of the country. The Meetei settlement in the fertile riverine belt had economically empowered the Meetei nation to emerge even stronger. Subjection of the tribes by stronger power had been a common affair in Manipur as well as in other parts of South East Asia. Kuki tribes remained a subject race of Manipur King.⁷¹ Khongjai tribes had to relinquish practices of human sacrifice as they came under the rule of Manipur.⁷² The Nagas had to regard Manipur as a greater power than the British.⁷³ Before the subjection of tribes under Manipur rule every tribal village was at war with another village.⁷⁴ Manipur power was a mediator to tribal feuds, internecine wars and it spread over the entire country, although the Manipur king usually had the least interference in the village autonomy of Manipur tribes. 'Cheithanrol Kumbaba', the royal chronicle of Manipur written in Meetei language cites at least about forty references for each hill tribes. There had been tribal allegiance to Meetei king and tributes had been paid. These historical facts had been elaborately mentioned in the above mentioned chronicle.⁷⁵

The common allegiance of the tribes to Meetei king did not however rule out revolts, uprisings from the hills, in which conflicts the Meeteis too paid heavy price. On the whole, the hill-plain relation had been harmonious, reciprocal and interdependent. The Meetei king had deeper feelings for the hill tribes. Meetei king Pamheiba (also known as Garib-Nawaz in western language) maintained the most cordial hill plain relation. Special department had been opened for the hill people. In the festival—'Mera Haochongba', the Tangkhuls descend from the hills, took complete liberties with the market norms as they could take away any commodity of their choice without paying any price whatsoever. It is believed that the Tangkhuls had been exercising their moral and historical right to take away Meetei property during this festival for the simple reason that Meetei forgot to give presents and gifts to their brother—the Tangkhuls. The harshness and rigours of feudalism and monarchy had also been born by one and all including the Meetei common men and hill peoples. Monarchy as an institution had

advantages in defence and common security of people and disadvantages in being oppressive to the common people in the entirety. At certain stage, Meetei common men had been at the receiving end, as the king the priestly class axis played their authoritarian hegemony over the rest of the people. Meeteis undergo internal contradictions as much as the Naga and the Kuki-Chin ethnoses undertake the process of ethnic integration and consolidation. The apparent ambient conflicts arise out of this process, which might not be smooth on occasions.

The Nation State

The tri-ethnic nation state of Manipur passed through the pre-history, proto-history and historical stages that spread over the ancient, the medieval and the modern periods.⁷⁷ It had golden periods as well as upheavals and devastations too in equal measures. The ethnic memory does not run short, when one makes an effort to reminisce 'Chahi Taret Khuntakpa' (Seven years devastation, 1819-1826). Manipur had been razed to ashes by the Burmese invaders and hardly about two thousand families could survive in Manipur valley. The unparalleled courage of prince Gambhirsing who cleared out the Burmese invaders from the entire region gave Manipur a fresh lease of life. British misadventure in Manipur in 1891, total disarmament of the Manipuris by the British on her defeat in the war, restoration of native rule followed by limited monarchy till 1947, and of Manipur's sovereignty from 1947-1949 were some of the important events in the history of Manipur.

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73. Johnstone, *op. cit.*, p.23.
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