

MANIPUR

A

BRITISH ANTHOLOGY

N. SANAJAOBA

MANIPUR

A British Anthology
(State and Country)

Vol. I



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AKANSHA PUBLISHING HOUSE
New Delhi

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Ph.: 5640621

Call No.....080.98417

Acc. No.....7986

First Edition, 2003
Manipur A British Anthology
©Reserved
ISBN 81-87606-30-4 (Vol. I)
ISBN 81-87606-31-2 (Vol. II)
ISBN 81-87606-32-0 (Set)

Typeset at
Advance Publishing Concept
Chamber No. 1A, Tis Hazari Courts, Civil Wing,
Typist Block, Delhi-110054,
Mobile : 9811571141, 5142551

PRINTED IN INDIA

Published by M.P. Misra for Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi
and Printed at Mehra Offset Press, Delhi.

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Preface

Manipur: A British Anthology (2 Vols.) is a selection of historical and ethnographical accounts of Manipur and her hill-plain people, contributed by a galaxy of British civil and military writes, who knew Manipur and her adjoining areas from their first hand experience, enriched by native informants and chronicles. The nineteenth century and early twentieth century Manipur has been meticulously depicted in this book.

I have published *Manipur: Past and Present*, (4 Vols.) along with another compendium volume - *Manipur: Treaties and Documents*, (Volume I) so far which collectively would provide sufficient historiographical materials about Manipur - a two millennia-old Asian State, now a constituent State of the Republic of India since 1949.

The British writings about Manipur are prolific. Some of them are not easily available in the market. I took the assistance of Sri Bharali, a learned Assamese official in the Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Government of Assam, Guwahati in selecting some materials from their archival collections. My thanks go to Sri Bharali.

I am grateful to Sri M.P. Misra, Director, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi for publishing the excellent volumes at a short notice. But for the inspiration of *Maichou Taret*, who struggled for the sake of truth against untruth in the 18th century, these volumes would not have been seen the light. The Anthology is a tribute to *Maichou Taret*, led by Khongnangthaba.

N. SANAJAOBA

THE BRITS MADE A POINT *In Lieu of Introduction*

Prof. N. Sanajaoba

Manipur had the first diplomatic level contact with the British company officials in Calcutta in 1762 at the time of their entry into a Manipuri-British defence treaty otherwise known as Verelst Treaty in the same year. William Bentinck was reluctant to continue linkage with Manipur and follow Major Grant's advice, yet they had to open British political agency in Manipur in 1835 and allow Manipur State open her agency in Cachar on reciprocal basis.

Manipur-British relation had further improved subsequently after the summit meeting (*Jilla Darbar*) between Manipur king Chandrakirti and Governor-General North-brook in August 1874 in Cachar. The meet took place on a ship floating over the river Barak.

Manipur historiographical sources (O. Bhogeshwar, Chandrakirti Jilla Changba) had defined the areas of agreement between the two high plenipotentiaries viz., mutual military assistance in any event of crisis, shifting the British office from Imphal to Kohima, responsibility of construction of road from Thibomei (Kohima) to Dimapur to be given to the British and Manipur king's responsibility to construct road from Thibomei to Imphal, among others.

The author's *Manipur: Treaties and Documents*, volume I (1992), has provided an elaborate arrangement of the major international instruments relevant to the State of Manipur as an independent Asian country. For lack of space, they are not recited in this write-up.

The immoral British intervention in Manipur's sovereignty resulted to the crushing defeat of the British invaders to Manipur palace in March 1891. After a summary military trial in Manipur's

Top Garod, the leader of invasion – Chief Commissioner of Assam Mr. J.W. Quinton and his subordinate British officials had been awarded capital punishment. The British in their petty war of revenge once again invaded Manipur from three fronts – Silchar, Tamu and Kohima, and defeated the Manipuri army in April 1891. Manipuri had been totally demilitarised and placed under British rule from 1891 to 1907.

An academic debate arose about ascertaining the actual date of the conclusive defeat of the Manipuri army given by the British soldiers, at the battle of Khongjom. The British records had noted the 25th April, 1891 as the fateful day on which day Manipur's precious hero Major Paona (honoured as general) had laid down his life. The Manipur chronicles record the date as 23rd April. In spite of the debate, Manipur government observes the Khongjom day on the 23rd April every year. This demonstrates just an example of the incongruence between British records and native Manipuri records. The issue is yet to be finally settled.

The British colonial rule of Manipur from 1891 to 1907 had been followed by presence of British shadow government till 1947, notwithstanding the *de jure* rule of Manipur Maharajah in the entire territory of present Manipur. There could be some confusion about the *de facto* British intervention in Manipur administration from 1907 to 1947. However, in legal terms Manipur Maharajah ruled Manipur during these 40 years of unwarranted British intervention. The British made their best attempts to divide Manipur into hill and plain areas as they followed the same 'divide and rule' form of rule in their colonial areas. After the British had terminated their paramountcy in Manipur in 1947, some of the academics would like to step into the shoes of the British and divide Manipur into hill and plain concepts despite the historical injunction against the futile British attempts. The ghost of the western colonial hegemony survives at present through the mindset of a tiny section of the intellectual cousins in the hill areas of Manipur. Miserably do they fail in dividing the upstream water from the downstream river water in Manipur. The British records have, therefore, could be best read in conformity with the records of Manipur, among others.

'Paramountcy' – a concept that the British successfully had propounded was a spurious term in the midst of accepted doctrines of international relations and law of the material period. In the

present-day doctrines, its nearest equivalent is 'hegemony' which is unrecognised in international law. However, Manipur being an independent country had been a British protected State. Even today varying degrees of protection are given by super-power(s) to independent States in South Asia or, elsewhere. The Indo-Soviet Treaty in 1972 was also a similar arrangement that did benefit the junior partner more than what a super-power could have been benefited.

The Brits made a point in engineering their hegemony in Manipur while making their best efforts to neutralise Burmese and other European powers from the western front. In that process, they had prepared meticulous reports about the land and people of Manipur by spending innumerable man-hours. They deserve appreciation for their efforts – their intentions are not unmixed though.

No Indian scholar neither historian nor anthro-archaeologist has given more attention to Manipur than what the British officials, for one reason or another, did both in terms of substance, fairness, and elaboration in as many as around 30 volumes apart from the and other colonial proceedings. Even after half-a-century old annexation of the State in the Indian-fold and enormous utilisation of human and material resources, the Indian historiographers cannot appreciate importance of Manipur to the most minimal extent. Their deliberate apathy and failure has to be compensated by all counts.

The present British anthology is a qualitative selection of the British accounts about the State which are under one cover. Under any circumstances whatsoever, the anthology could claim to be a substitute of their comprehensive and highly meticulous volumes.

The British writers may or may not deserve space in the hall of fame for scholars extraordinary, and we do not jump into that kind of polemic. However, in spite of their best efforts to maintain fairness and neutrality, we cannot rule out the preponderant colonial reason, they were supposed to advance in their vital national and colonial interest. Their overseas territories had also to fill in their coffers, besides their claim of launching civilising missions as the indispensable white men's burden. The proposition is partly true and partly absurd. But for them, India should have never emanated and the apportioning the criticism for partition with them would be a partisan rhetoric. No sensible historian would ever accuse the

Britishers of their inability to leave a political legacy of a vast India empire in lieu of the then withering British empire. Logic comes to a sudden end as soon as imperial dreams blur the territorial consolidation the British so far had encompassed in the present India of continental magnitude. Manipur would not have come to Indian-fold but for the British intervention in Manipur's municipal jurisdiction. No India has existed before they landed in the continent.

The *raison d'être* of British scribes was an extension of the overall colonial policy. The contemporary version may be seen in the extensive knowledge of sensitive areas of the world reaching out to the American intelligence network round the clock. They had a need.

The British Home Department made it obligatory for the British Court of Directors in India (or Manipur for that matter by extension), to furnish every detail of village or district under their supervision. The British political agents or military officials in Manipur had accordingly, acted on under strict rules in preparing the ethnographical records in pursuit of their *Pax Britannica* which is substituted by the present-day *Pax Indiana*.

The intellectual efforts for building *Pax Britannica* is very much different in the case of *Pax Indiana*. By oversight, the Brits might have mistaken a few facts whereas the scholars extraordinary belonging to the latter camp have no scruples in venturing concocted history of Manipur by falsely tracing the genealogy of Manipur kings and nobles to *Mahabharata* and sanskritising the entire set of Manipuri mythology, folk tradition, civil society and belief-system at the cost of traditional Manipur values that successfully tied the ethos of the hill people to that of their brethren – the valley people. Before sanskritisation, Manipur civilization came to exist. The present generation of Manipuri septuagenarians and octogenarians have grown up with this inbuilt mindset and rigid social attitudes. Before the proselytisation and sanskritisation and at a latter stage, Christianisation of Manipur hills, the hill and plain people of Manipur had never dreamt of their belonging to divided houses. Modernisation is inevitable, but the mild form of *social apartheid* that the Manipuri Vaishnavites nurture in relation to their hill brethren in the past two centuries was an uncharitable gift of the concocted Aryan racial and imperial history. The Brits reports are nearly free from these negative aspects and prejudices. If they had any, it was less baneful.

The methodology adopted by the British political agents or military officials in writing the accounts was fairly reliable. The scribes collected primary-source information from their Manipur wives, Manipuri court recorders, local informants close to the establishment and on their own, from social surveys. The court scribes narrated the *Mahabharata* nexus of Manipuri ruling house and some of the scribes simply incorporated the narrative in their accounts. Some of them had learnt Manipuri language to their administrative advantage.

The Brits has passed certain uncharitable remarks in regard to Manipuri group behaviour and attitudes. Two parameters acted behind their opinion. Firstly, they had assumed on their own a mission on civilising the savage by using their western benchmarks. Secondly, some of the local traits failed to appeal to their conscience. Ethnocentrism could be the primary reason in forming their independent opinions about the Manipuris. It would also be noted that Manipuri civil society was not free from criminalities as much as they are found in every society. The British officials in rendering their assistance to the administration of justice in Manipur might have seen more of the social offenders than the average Manipuri and this limited observation might have led them to form their assessments. Generalisation is a risky academic exercise. The British permissiveness, feudal nature, arrogance, opportunism, indulgence in wine and meat, so and so forth equally fall short of the oriental values. The reader can overcome these insignificant difficulties in perusing the British reports, which are otherwise credible and noteworthy.

Pre-historical archaeological evidence of Pleistocene man's settlement in Manipur has been advanced by W. Yumjao (Singh) as an amateur and latter since 1969 by O. Kumar (Singh) with approved professional skills. In the event of any absence of writing skills of early Meetei known otherwise as Manipuri since the 18th century A.D. in the early Christian ear or, absence of a written history in that age. Protohistory of Manipur could be traced to early Christian ear. Gangmumei Kabui of Manipur University made a brief historiographical survey of Manipur in his preface to *History of Manipur*, volume I (1991). *Manipur: Past and Present*, volume I, launched in March 1985, published at the fag-end of 1987 (1988 in book) had already provoked the historical sense already the multi-disciplinary approach adopted in *Manipur: Past and Present* had also

been followed by established historians in Assam or North-East in their latter publications. Our 1987 publication preceded many of them in similar tracks.

In all fairness, the private project of launching *Manipur: Past and Present* had in its turn been influenced by historians concern for sources of Manipur history. *Sources of History of Manipur* (1985) edited by S.N. Pandey had initiated the discourse, although some of the chapters written by non-native historians of India about Manipur were not far from being amateurish and occasional in approach and substance. They apparently ignore or, are unaware of the history of Manipur barring their India mainstream history and archaeology. They have an extra mile to go in meeting out complete justice to Manipur historiography, which would survive independent of their malicious concern.

More than one hundred scholars, largely of the native pool had contributed to four volumes of *Manipur: Past and Present* (MPP) thereby generating enormous amount of qualitative data or historiographical substance in regard to the people of Manipur. Professors like Keimendorf do make fair assessment of the MPP. The private project of the author had not official strings or doctoring valves that could have censored facts, found to be uncomfortable to the rulers.

Like P.N. Oak and his school of historical thought that professed that all the monuments constructed by the Muslims in India had been actually built by the Hindus and the present wave of explicit doctoring of Indian history at the behest of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, there are believers who subscribe that but for the proselytisation and modernisation by the British, history of Manipur would have been barren and simply bizarre. They require, therefore, a falsified history in the process. The absurdity is untenable.

Another problem lies with the historians' obsession with the definition of history, usually in terms of a dramatised biography of kings. People have been pushed out of the ring of history. People's performance and achievements are of equal historical value, let alone the sectarian dogmatism. *Manipur: Past and Present* is an eloquent and elaborate statement of Manipur peoples' history, albeit the biography of rulers.

Of all the chronicles, two of them – *the Cheitharol Kumbaba* (CK) and *the Nigthourol Lambuba* (NL) stand out as Manipur history – the

CK being considered to be more important than the NL. Normally, the British accounts could be cross-checked by considering them as the benchmark. The disadvantage in the study of Manipur chronicles lies in the fact that author's name, year of writing or documentation had been found missing. Besides, the native chronicles could have changed hands after every devastation that Manipur passed through, more particularly due to the periodic invasion of the Burmese in Manipur. The documentation process has not therefore been full-proof. Spurious writings could possibly have been floated by interested persons. Like the Mongols, who had been keen to maintain secret records, the Manipuris did maintain secret writing about the kings known as '*Larei Lathup*'. The scope for contention could, therefore be stretched in Manipur historiography.

The British reports have been found to be credible and reliable in spite of certain uncharitable remarks, they had to pass upon the national trait, as many of the writer-officials had been widely considered to be fair, fiercely independent and above all, they had no axe to grind with.

Manipur: A British Anthology contains 27 chapters which are divided in two volumes. Volume I contains Manipur General and Volume II contains two parts namely, I. Manipuri Law, Customs and Hill-men and II. Language and Culture

I. Manipur General

B.C. Allen had contributed, among others, to the physical aspects of the native States of Manipur. Francis Hamilton had noted that Manipur was the name of the capital of the country. In fact, *Meeteileibak* had been renamed Manipur in 18th century and present Manipur had the least business or nexus with *Mahabharata* epic. Manipuri's neighbours had been Nagaland and Assam, and not Hindustan in the past.

Manipur history had been ingeniously concocted by some historians in order to falsely bring Manipur to the Indian-fold and serve the purpose of Indian colonial annexation of Manipur in their pursuit of the political-cultural goals of resurrecting a *Pax Indiana*, as chosen by some Shantidas Gosain who converted Manipur king Pamheiba alias Garibnawaz to Hinduism. Since then, internal revolt took place under the leadership of seven topmost scholars (*Maichou Taret*) in the 18th century and palace intrigues ensued periodically.

R. Boileau Pemberton's Manipur has been comprehensive in that it took note of Manipur's fluctuating boundary and Manipur's relation with Burma and the British. British spelling about Manipur is simply mind-boggling, and the readers may not be comfortable with capricious spellings of Manipur.

John M'Cosh wrote about the Manipuri horsemen, among others, who had been found useful to Burmese cavalry after the latter took Manipuri prisoners of war in 1819-1825 war. Like some of the Indian historians who concocted Manipur history as extension of Aryan civilization, the Burmese historians and subsequent writers including Aung San Kyi had mistaken Manipur as Burmese territory. In Burmese-Manipuri wars that spread over nearly five centuries, both the powers had temporary occupation of each other's territory; Burmese history and Indian history had mistakenly incorporated independent Manipur as their territory. No more academic offences would possibly more heinous than these planted mischief and mistakes. The British officials had not been fully informed of the irrefutable status of Manipur's political sovereignty in the past two millennia.

J. Forbes Watson and John William Kaye had written about the Manipuri aborigines whose settlement extended to the East and South-East Asia from the Brahmaputra basin to China. R. Brown's Statistical Account of Manipur had furnished facts and figures about Manipuri economic, political, social and cultural life. Edward Gait, primarily an historian of Assam had briefly touched upon the past of Manipur, although Manipur was not a part of Assam. For some time, Assam chief commissioner had common administration in both Assam and Manipur, and the temporary colonial arrangement had led some academicians to have mistaken Manipur as a part of Assam. Historians of all hues and persuasions by their total ignorance or imperial ambitions had misconceived Manipur as either part of Burma or, Assam, or, Hindusthan and present-day Indian administrators have emerged out of these misrepresented cocoons. The present anthology would remove some their misled beliefs and emotive, transcendental speculations.

The *Imperial Gazetteer* has registered that Mongolian tribes had occupied the valley. B.C. Allen, E.A. Gait, C.G. Allen and H.F. Howard had documented that all the hill tribes of Manipur were the subjects of Manipuri king. Their documentation conforms to the records

entered in the CK and the NL. They noted that the post-Hindu written records were unreliable. Concoctions had been retrospectively made by the court chroniclers directly under the mandate of Shantidas Gosain in the 18th century and their concoctions had been made the basis of some of Manipur history books that are taught in schools and colleges in the State in the 20th century. Manipur population in 1881 was 221,070 against 2.4 million in the 2001 census.

Mr. Reid documented the British grooming of Maharajah Churachand in the colonial mould and mindset, and also the British handing over of the Manipur administration to Manipur Maharajah Chura Chand on the 15th May, 1907 after 16 years of Major Maxwell's colonial occupation and foreign rule. A governor of undivided Assam in 1937-1941, Mr. Reid wrote: "The new status assumed by Burma under the Act of 1935 raised the question of the relations of Manipur with that country, no longer part of India but a separate Dominion." Throughout the history, Burma's relation with India was similar to Manipur's relation with India. Assam in the past had been the geographical buffer between mainland India and the sovereign State of Manipur; on the part of Assam, she came to the fold of British-India in 1826, not so long ago. These historical facts have been misconstrued by a few scholars, who solicited the Indian annexation of Manipur their political motive remaining a suspect.

B.C. Allen had reported about the political status of Manipur as a sovereign State and that the Manipuri people spoke Meithei, Naga and Kuki languages. The Bishnupuriyas had been descendents of 120 Hindu immigrant families from outside Manipur. The British records about the Bishnupuriyas match with the Manipuri chronicles about the Bishnupuriya immigrants who were by all available records. Assamese-North Bengali-Oriya-Magadhi ancestry. The Kamarupis (Kamrup is the old name of Assam) otherwise known as Mayang to the Manipuris migrated to Manipur in the medieval period and converted themselves to Meeteis till the later part of 1950s when a section of the immigrants revoked their earlier conversion for purely political reasons in Cachar, Tripura and Bangladesh. The Mayangs were allowed to settle in Lamtangtong (Lamangdong) later on renamed as Bishnupur and they were known as Bishnupuriya (*puriah* = settlers). Their political leadership changed the Bishnupuriya to Bishnupriya for their own convenience. All the available historical records maintain that Bishnupuriyas or Bishnupriyas as Kamarupis or, North Bengalis.

The Kamrupi Bishnupriyas during their interaction with the Meeteis has assimilated a few thousand Meetei vocabulary, and they had fully converted themselves into Meetei by intermarriage and social interaction. The British records and Manipuri chronicles have to be compared in the process of study of this component of Meetei society in the medieval period. The Meetei composite society assimilated the Nagas, the Kukis, the Chinese, the Burmese, Ahom-Tais, Kamrupis, Bengalis, people of Islamic and Brahmanic order from the neighbouring States in the mainstream of the Meeteis, who emerges out of the amalgamation of seven major population groups in seven independent principalities. A handful of scholars made vain attempts to segregate the Kamrupi-Bishnupriya from the greater, composite Meetei ethnicity for meeting their political demands of breaking the Manipuri society into the building blocks, and tearing out Manipuri entity.

The Manipuris had been conceived by Edward Tuite Dalton as a refined race having affinity with the Nagas and Kukis. He noted that several clans of the Tangkhuls (Luhupas) and internecine feuds, and so did the Mao with the Maram. Dalton had also been misinformed about the so-called Manipuri descent from the *Mahabharata* by the post-Hindu *pandits*. The hoax of that kind still haunts the Manipuri psyche. We are yet to remove the hoax.

R. Brown dwelt upon the origin of the Manipuri. Alexander Mackenzie considered Manipur as an independent State with British protection and covered the Anglo-Manipuri relation. Varying degrees of protection are given to contemporary States by either a super power or, a military pact like the NATO, so and so forth. Protection and sovereignty are mutually complimentary. The British had national interest in rendering protection to independent Manipur.

E. W. Dun had furnished the demographic picture of Manipur as it existed in 1881. "In their habits generally the Manipuris are cleanly and they bathe their bodies frequently", thus wrote Dun. "We have no direct proof of Hinduism having existed in Manipur previous to the 18th century." Dun's observation was true, and Hinduism, as Manipur chronicles record, is an event of recent past; so is the Aryanisation or Sanskritisation efforts. The concocted history books are intended to falsely trace Manipuri ethnogenesis to the Aryan historiography by total denial of their own tradition, culture and early civilisation. *Manipur: Past and Present* (volume I to IV) have

partially washed out the concoctions, but the malaise took deep roots in Manipuri mind due to the medieval royal social sanctions.

Some of the British accounts had depicted Manipuri national behaviour in a clumsy way. Some of the traits could have been true but their physical observation had been limited to criminals and prison houses which need not be generalised. But, at the same time, the oriental behaviour is not always praiseworthy. We can, however, censor highly uncharitable remarks passed by the foreigners.

Manipuri sensibility is sharp, and sometimes, characterised by unnecessary haste. A district gazetteer had been banned. The books *Politics in North-East India (Manipur)* and a *History of Manipur (An Early Period)* have been banned from further circulation, and these works have incorporated mischiefs that hurt Manipuri sensibilities. Academic freedom could have been judiciously used and intemperate words could have been removed from books which otherwise contain excellent information about Manipur. However, cleverly concocted history books which use refined language and finely woven hoax and half truths that cannot sustain critical scrutiny are accorded respectability and used for colonial indoctrination by the ruling establishment. Authentic Manipuri names and surnames are retrospectively supplanted by Aryan names and clan names exclusively for cultural colonisation. The present Manipuri elite and intelligentsia save some sections fail to liberate themselves from these primary sins and errors.

II. Manipur Hill-men, Law, Customs, Language and Culture

T.C. Hodson's 'The Meithei' is a fair account of the Meetei, now widely known as Manipuri.

M. McCulloch and also George Watt in their independent assessment wrote about Manipuri hill tribes – the Manipuri Naga and the Manipuri Kuki, who equally dominate Manipur hills at present. The term 'Manipuri' has territorially and nationally evolved so much, so that it incorporates all the lawful settlers in Manipur, who share the common destiny with the mainstream Manipuri. The terms such as 'Meetei', 'Mayang' or 'Kalashaiya' and 'Hao' (all tribes of Manipur) had been innocuous and read in plain meaning in the past, despite the political linguistics of today that sneaked into the semantic vitality of the past. These words carried healthy

semantic functions till the Manipuri Hindu converts because of their puritanist self-righteousness placed a wedge between the Manipuri-hill men and Manipuri plain-dwellers, and the wedge has been disproportionately enlarged by political ecclestatics who dream of creating a vast empire in between China and India after balkanising Manipur hills and by shrinking Manipuri territory to a petty township at the mercy of a vast Christian empire. At this critical juncture, the Kamrupi-Bishnupriyas at the behest of racist fundamentalist Aryan demagogues had made vain attempts to fragment Manipuri community into its building blocks. The political linguistics has operated in the midst of these recidivist balkanising forces.

Ethel St. Clair Grimwood noted that the Tongkhul's (Tangkhul's) heads were shaved with the exception of a ridge along the top and the Kuki's hair was long and gathered up into a loose and very untidy knot. She had admired Manipur and the Manipuris. Some hard facts depicting the palace intrigues would not be very much fascinating to some section of people, but the 1890-1891 Manipur palace intrigues have been corroborated by Manipuri chronicles – the '*Puyas*' and the '*Larei Lathups*' (the secret accounts of Manipur kings). Interestingly, the Mongols like the Manipuris maintain secret writings, in addition to their official and formal history.

Colonel (Sir) James Johnstone, who knew eastern customs and language rendered the British political agency as an effective medium of leaving a lasting British impression to the natives. He effectively handled the Manipur and Naga hill district – a state under the name of Nagaland by now. The British transfer of the disputed Kabaw valley to the Burmese for the appeasement of the latter did not make Johnstone popular in Manipur.

About the tribal blood feuds, he wrote, "Blood feuds were common among all the hill tribes, but the system was carried to excess among the Angamis." Quite incidentally, Mr. Phizo who demanded independence of the then Naga hills district of Assam and started Naga militant freedom movement seven years after the first Manipur insurgency occurred since 1949 to 1951, was an Angami by clan classification, although he belonged to the wider Nagaland patriotic entity.

Like Pemberton and several other British officials who had a dispassionate assessment of Manipuri's international boundary,

Colonel Johnstone after having field assessment of the boundary by being a member in several teams wrote, "The territories of Manipur varied according to the mettle of its rulers. Some times they held a considerable territory east of the Chindwin river in subjection, at other times only the Kubo valley, a strip of territory, inhabited, to by the Burmese, but by Shans, and lying between Manipur proper and the Chindwin." As found in several other British records, the western international boundary of Manipur as recorded reached as far as said in upper Assam covering the entire Nagaland. He also wrote that the Nagas treated the Manipuris as a superior power to the British. But the fact-sheet overturned after the British completely demilitarised the Manipur power in 1891 and the Indian dominion repeated the same since 1949.

Colonel Johnstone recorded the Chinese interest, "About the year A.D. 1250, a large Chinese force invaded the country, and was signally defeated; all who were not killed being made prisoners." T.C. Hodson also had wide experience about the Nagas.

Hodson recorded, "The second group of tradition affords a link with the general tradition which makes the Nagas, Kukis and Manipuris descended from a common ancestor, who had three sons who became the progenitors of those tribes." The tradition has been respected by the Tangkhuls, the Maos, among others, till engineered ethnocide took the centre-stage in 1992 in Manipur because of Bosnianization programs followed by Naga expansionists. Yet the tradition remains intact despite the ethnocide and efforts made towards the dissolution of the territorial state of Manipur, engineered by a militant group and a wing of the Union Government of India. Manipur uprising in June 2001 for one whole month and the killing of 18 lives mostly, Manipuri children by the security forces in the sudden uprising against the conspiracy aimed at dissolution of Manipur State sealed the dissolution-efforts. Manipur uprising set Manipur Assembly building, chief minister's building, among others ablaze during popular protest against the malafide acts of the Union Government of India.

J. Shakespear – undoubtedly an established authority on Lushai, Mizo or Kuki affairs wrote that the old Kuki clans such as Chiru and Anal had been cited in Manipuri chronicles in the middle of the 16th century AD and the Aimols in 1723. The old Manipuri Kuki clans included Aimol, Anal, Chawte, Chiru, Kolhen, Kom, Langang,

Purum, Tikhup and Vaiphei. Some of the old Kuki clans had been subjected to coercive Nagaisation agenda in pursuit of a Pan-Naga movement for a vast Christian empire, which would erase out Manipur, upper Assam, substantial part of Arunachal Pradesh from the map. However, a large section of the Kukis refuse to enforced conversion to Nagaisation, and the Manipur territorial boundary that existed in 1947 before the Constitution of India comes to exist, prevails notwithstanding all conspiracy, intrigues made by corridors of power. After annexation, attempts have been made to wipe out Manipur and build dream empires in her place impossible.

The major population groups in Manipur are Meeteis, the Nagas and the Kukis who speak Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Burman languages and share common ancestry, notwithstanding uneven economic developments in the hill areas which are not utilised fully for economic development because of the retrograde land law – the MLR Act, 1960 and optimal economic utilization of the valley. The provisional census figure in 2001 provides for the ratio of the three major native population groups and their power-sharing equations. Meeteis are not allowed to settle in their own hills by Indian laws framed after Indian annexation in 1949.

The figure: Meeteis 15,28,725; Nagas 3,05,802 and Kukis (including old Kukis) 3,43,243. If the old Kuki population of 21,722 is added to the Naga group, the Kukis and the Nagas have equivalent population strength. The population ratio between Meetei on the one hand and the Naga-Kuki on the other hand would be 5 : 2. If the population ratio is reflected in terms of Assembly seats Meetei MLA's ought to be 42 against the present 40 in the Assembly of 60 seats. However, the Meetei being the majority people at their cost have to concede more representation of the minority. We simply furnish the information for analysis of facts and not for any eventual claims for fair representation of the majority group in elected seats.

The inference is that Manipur hills are equally dominated by the Nagas and Kukis in near-absolute terms, despite the falsification of facts by the multimedia and scholars of mala fide intentions or, unscrupulous propangadists. The 30 tribes and the majority Meetei population group share a common destiny in the State of Manipur by egalitarian power-sharing and partnership.

B.C. Allen had described the traditional industries of Manipur such as weaving of cloth, silk industry, making of metal utensils, pottery, carpentry, use of mineral deposits, iron and copper etc.

He noted that Brahmins and Rajkumars sublet lands without ploughing their lands; and famines occurred quite often. The feudal tenet that did not help the production of wealth by two Meetei clans is obsolete; it is a slur on dignity of labour.

Manipuri alphabet and Manipur system of writing has been a continuing concern for the Manipuri scholarship. History had to be written with the writing system; and one ought to separate the mythology from history; a line has to be drawn between prehistory and history. The first four centuries of Manipur history after Christ remained a vague period and not details of the Manipuri kings could be depicted. These gaps have to be explained with excellent reasons devoid of speculations and emotive constructions of all sorts.

G.H. Damant and G.A. Grierson described about the Manipuri alphabet. Their statement merely points to possibilities and probable surmises when they wrote that Manipuri alphabet might have been derived from Bengal system. The origin of Manipuri alphabet might have been influenced by the Brahmi or, the Bengal school or, it could have been indigenous. The issue remains contentious and a definite conclusion may not be arrived in haste at present. Controversy about the so-called Khongtekcha copper plate of the 8th century A.D. remains inconclusive. The copper plate might have been planted, or, could have been prepared in the medieval period by some traveller Hindu pandit who passed through Manipur palace or, the capital journey. Undisputed corroboration by other evidence like stone inscription or manuscripts or even the folk tradition has not yet established the authenticity of the so-called copper plate.

Manipuri scholars point out certain factual errors as they are found in the British accounts about Manipur. Paunam Gunindra, among a host of others in the que, particularly in his book *Manipuri Culture: A Meetygeng Ama'* has identified some errors. Some of his findings are noted hereafter in this book.

T.C. Hodson had described the Meithies religious tradition of Manipur such as worship of ancestors, religious rites and ceremonies, sacrifices, priesthood, etc.

The CK has recorded the reign of 50 Manipuri kings in succession from A.D. 33 to A.D. 1714, whereas Dun had noted only 47 kings. He did not give reasons. The regime of King Pakhangba at the beginning of the Christian era had been wrongly recorded by Brown. Some of the British accounts had wrongly endorsed the

descent of King Pamheiba alias Garibnawaz as one from the Naga clans; Pamheiba was beyond any doubt, a Meetei king, although in his childhood he grew among the Naga folks for his political security. They might have unmaliciously mistaken his childhood environment as his descent. Hiding in the hills was common practice among Meetei, princes.

B.C. Allen had by mistake written that Garibnawaz made an expedition in Burma in 1754, three years after his death in 1751. McCulloch had recorded only three sons out of 18 sons of Pamheiba. The court officials might have excluded 15 from official counting.

King Shameirang in the 6th century A.D. had recommended Meetei professional surnames and McCulloch attributed it to King Chalamba. The administrative units like *Pana* had been either literally or functionally interpreted by a number of Meetei scholars. The British interpretation of *Pana* might fall in any of the native interpretations. In historical interpretation, access to methods like heuristics or hermeneutics could leave sufficient space for choosing one of the plural implications dogmatism could lead one to a blind alley. In Manipuri intellectual discourses, the choice of any of the two similar words like 'Meetei' or 'Meitei' could lead to unending contentions, whereas both of them could be used ungrudgingly. The difference between American and British spelling of hundreds of English words might have created havoc to the linguists. It did not Minor factual variations are found in-between and among the Manipuri chronicles, let alone the British accounts. The second edition of CK itself is a comparative compilation of several *Kumbaba(s)* that had been in the private custody of a number of Meetei scholars.

The CK is widely accepted to be the benchmark or, master-chronicle of Manipur history. Who was the first record-keeper and when was it recorded for the first time are pertinent questions, that slip into hazy areas of speculation and fertile imaginations. In his introduction to the CK (1989 edition). Manipuri poet Elangbam Nilakanta constructed three possible periods of writing the CK.

Firstly, the CK might have been written in A.D. 33. Had the Manipuri writing system evolved in that era is a vague issue. Secondly, the CK might have been written during the regime of King Kiyamba in 1467 *circa*. There was a strong possibility in this statement. Thirdly, the CK could have been written during the regime of King Bhagyachandra in 1780 *circa*.

Frequently Burmese devastation of Manipur in the five centuries of bitterness among the neighbours and Burmese expansions could have damaged or destroyed the original copies very frequently and duplicate copies would have been prepared after the restoration of normalcy. The political instability may be considered as a primary cause of the variations which are commonly found in Manipuri chronicles. The reconstructed materials have to invariably bear the stamp of occasional variations that could be resolved only through liberal accommodative interpretation devoid of hard dogmatism. Fanatical claims would render truth a casualty of impatience or sectarianism.

Besides the difficulties created by spurious history books that negate the facts recorded in the CK, the NL, authentic local chronicles and other scientific evidence, distorted pro-Aryan texts that divide the hill and plain people of common ancestry, periods, year, day and date assume Centre-State of Manipur historiography.

Interestingly, the exact day and date on which Major Paona (conferred Generalship) had been killed in the Khongjom battle in April, 1891 have remained contentious. The British records register the date as 25th April, whereas the CK had registered the date as 23rd April 1891. In Y. Yaima committee of nine members which was entrusted in 1981 with the task of deciding exact date of Paona's death, four members – R.K. Snahal Singh, N. Khelchandra Singh, R.K. Jhalajit Singh and E. Nilakanta Singh – of whom three are Manipuris leading historians supported the 25th April on the basis of 14 important records and documents.

Five persons, of which one is a doctorate in Anglo-Manipuri relation, viz., A. Minaketan Singh, R.K. Madhuryajit Singh, S. Gourahari Singh, Ph. Nandalal Sharma and Dr. L. Chandramani Singh supported the 23rd April move.

The Yaima Committee "after examining the latter (*sic*. 23 April, 1891) carefully and thoroughly, considered that it was logical to rely on the authenticity of the Cheitharol Kumbaba because of its traditional value and high regard paid to it by the general public being the State official record." Paonam Phalendrajit's book on Paona Brajabasi (1998) furnished the historic debate on the Khongjom day. Authenticity, traditional value and public regard have been accepted as the criteria of ascertaining historical dates. Future research on the

subject may not be closed. We cite an example of contentions facts from amongst many for the sake of illustration.

British accounts may also be assessed by using the *CK* and *NL* as one of the benchmarks without thereby undermining other equally-strong corroborative-historical evidence. The historiographical activities in Manipur and her adjoining areas have entered the threshold, and the future holds the space for revealing many more possibilities and the key to undeciphered historical vocabulary.

British Contributors . . .

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- Robert Reid
- Edward Tuite Dalton
- Alexander Mackenzie
- George Watt
- J. Shakespear
- G.H. Damant
- G.A. Grierson
- Imperial Gazetteer

"A pretty place, more beautiful than many of the show-places of the world".

—*Ethel Grimwood about Manipur*

"Even upto the Naga Hills campaign of 1879-80, the Nagas regarded Manipur as the greater power of the two (the other being British), because her conduct was consistent; if she threatened, she acted".

—*Sir James Johnstone*

"Two years subsequently (*sic.* 1937) he (Manipur king) successively defeated two Burmese armies, amounting to 7000 foot, 700 horses, and 20 elephants, and devastated the whole country from the banks of Khodoung Choung to Debuyen".

—*E.W. Dun*

"On the conclusion of the Burmese war by the treaty of Gendabo (*sic.* Yandaboo) in 1826, Manipur was declared independent, and in 1835 a political agent was appointed".

—*R. Brown*

ISBN 81-87606-32-0



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