

A Glimpse of the State formation of Ancient Manipur

Dr. H. Rajmani Singha

Abstract

The geographical condition of Manipur is divided into two regions, that is, hills and valleys. While the area of the hills is nine parts of the total area of Manipur and the area of the valley is only one part. If the areas of the two parts are compared, Manipur is quite a hilly state. In the early days, in the hills surrounding the Manipur Valley, there were several independent hill villages under the command of a village chief or king. As in the hills, there were also several independent ethnic groups throughout the valley.

Today's Manipur integrating both the hills and the valley is fruit of the prolonged maneuver of about 1850 years by erstwhile Kanglei kings who assiduously brought phase by phase the different group of the valley and then the different tribes of the hills, who were all independent of one another, under a single, unique administrative system. However Manipur's geographically is small but it has a permanent territorial boundaries. It has been maintaining its unique identity till now. As such, the attempt by certain vested interests to disintegrate this age old unique integrity of Manipur is a big challenge to all the people of Manipur and is quite deplorable. To preserve the integrity of this little state, the rising generations also have a great role to play. Both the hills people and the plain people, who have lived together under a unique administrative system for several centuries, should strive to protect the integrity of Manipur for peaceful and harmonious co-existence.

Key Words: Manipur, Meitei, development, hill area etc.

Dr. H. Rajmani Singha, Assistant Prof. Dept. of Manipuri, Assam University, Silchar,
Email.- rajmanih@gmail.com

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Introduction:

The geographical condition of Manipur is divided into two regions, that is, hills and valleys. While the area of the hills is nine parts of the total area of Manipur and the area of the valley is only one part. If the areas of the two parts are compared, Manipur is quite a hilly state. In the early days, in the hills surrounding the Manipur Valley, there were several independent hill villages under the command of a village chief or king. As in the hills, there were also several independent ethnic groups throughout the valley.

Different hill tribes like Tangkhul, Kabui, Mao, Maram, Khongjai, Anal, Maring, Chiru, Chothe, Koireng, Purum, Tarao, Koirao, Kom, Moyon, Monshang, Thadou, Mahou, Kharam, Lamkang, etc. settled in the hills. In early period, different ethnic groups such as Wangam Ningthouja, Angom Nongban, Nungban Luwang, Adon Nongyai/Khuman, Kege Ngangoi/Moirang, Khaba, Nganba, Thanga Kambong, Haorok Konthou, Thongnang Mangang, Selloi Langmai, Heirem Khunjan, Nongban Fantek, Lokkha Haokha, Urok Usai, Huitou, Lanbi Sansen, Kambong Lokkhu, Lokkhu Lokhal, Thopshel Ngashel, Lera Khongnang, Manting Marang, Khende Chairel, Khunbi Lonlang, etc. settled scattered in the valley area.

Since the reign of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, the first historical king of Manipur, in 33 A.D. there has been a long history of about 1850 years of integration of Manipur by conquering and subjugating the different ethnic peoples of the hills and valley one by one. We may analyze the unification of the hills and the valley in two stages (1) Unification of the valley and (ii) Integration of the hill villages.

Objectives of the study:

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To study the background and historical development of Manipur.
2. To study about the historical background of the state formation of ancient Manipur.
3. To focus the role played by the Meitei to formation of ancient Manipur.
4. To study the historical impact of the Manipur state.

Methodology of the study:

In this research paper a large number of data are available in the form of written records like books, magazines, journals, official records and newspaper etc. For the collection of these data, it is needed to explore from the various records. In this study the method will be base on historical and empirical. The tools and data required for the collection of the work will be based with the help of primary and secondary data. In this study the analytical method will also be applied.

Unification of the valley region:

When Nongda Lairen Pakhangba reigned at Kangla, there were different independent principalities in the valley area, of those independent ethnic groups, we may mention Khaba, Lokkha, Haokha, Chenglei, Angom, Mangang, Thanga Kambong, Luwang, Fantek, Heirem Khunjan, Khuman, Moirang, etc. These ethnic groups lost their independence one by one and were brought under the administrative control of the Meitei king. The unification of the valley region under the Meitei king to form a Meitei state can be studied in the following way.

Loss of Independence of the Khaba :

At one time, the Khabas were a powerful ethnic group. At first they were inhabiting in the area around Taknakha (Leikotpat). When Nongda Lairel Pakhangba reigned at Kangla, the Khabas rose against him and defeated him, Nongda fled to Moirang and took refuge there. Now the Khabas took control of Kangla and ruled there. After some time, Nongda with the help of Moirang marched to Kangla to fight against the Khabas. In the battle, the chief of Khaba, Khwai Nungjengba was killed by the arrow of Moirang's Chaoba Soubon Ngamba Sangton Sanouba near Nungjeng Pat of Kangla during 33 A.D. After the death of their chief, the Khabas fled helter-skelter. A section of the Khabas ran to the east and became Tangkhul Machiba. Another section took shelter at the feet of Angom chief, Pureiromba. Another Khaba group fled to the west and became Kabui Nungngang. Another section fled to the north and became Khaba Unlen at Koubru Laikha. Another section ran to the south and became the Mahou Lontai. Khaba Nongnganba surrendered to Pakhangba. One Khaba Nongnganba surrendered to Nongda Lairel Pakhangba and forgave him. Thus the descendants of Khaba Nongnganba became two families Khaba clan, Nongjengbam and Khuraijam. Since they could not stand as one clan, they merged with their ethnically related Nganba and became Khaba Nganba as one of the seven clans of the Meitei.

Loss of Lokkha-Haokha independence :

Lokkha Haokha were a group of people settling in and around Sugnu. This group lost their independence when Yoimongba and Taothingmang (264-364) subdued them during the two brother's river clearing expedition.

Loss of Chenglei independence :

This clan is one of the seven major clans of the Meitei. In early period, this clan was settled in the area of Khurai Ahonggei, just to the north of the Kangla. During fifth century A.D., Meidingu Naokhamba defeated Chenglei king Thangyi Khongjromba alias Khongji Nunlaiba and took forcibly Yoreiba Chanu the wife of Thangyi Khongjromba and made the Kanglei queen. From this period, the Chenglei clan was subdued and lost their independence.

Loss of Angom independence :

This clan was at one time very powerful. They played a great role to enthrone Nongda Lairen Pakhangba at Kangla. From the very beginning, they had a very close and good relation with the Meitei kings. Ethnically they also belong to the same origin with the Wangngam Ningthouja. But, during the reign of king Shameirang subdued the Angoms by defeating their king Kwakpa Thawanthaba, and then from that period of 518 A.D., they lost their independence. After loss of their independency, they were coming in taking a great part in the Meitei administration. The Angom king in the Meitei administration was known as Angoupanba and he was the head of the

Judiciary in the Meitei administration upto the period of 1891.

Loss of Mangang indendence :

Mangang was a very old ethnic group of Manipur. This ethnic group was once settled at the Loijing Sharonya, in the Loijing hills at the place where the Kharam Pallel is settled now. In the seventh century A.D., Meidingu Naothingkhong raided upon the Mangang village and defeated Mangang Konkhucha Atengba, the son of Mangang Ningthou Punshiba. From this event, king Naothingkhong was known as Mangang Ngamba. From this time the Mangangs lost their identity and they were absorbed by the Nganba Khumujam, a sub-section of Khaba Nganba clan.

Loss of Thanga Kambong independence :

This group was one of the earliest ethnic groups of the valley They settled in and around south east areas of Kanglei on the banks of the Waishel river. They were subdued by king Naothingkhong during his retreat from war expedition upon Mangang, who were settled at Loijing Sharonya of Loijing hills in the west. From this period of 663 A.D., the Thanga Kambong lost their independence.

Loss of Luwang independence :

This clan was also a big ethnic group. They ruled independently in the area surrounded by Langol hill, Loijing hill and Koubru hill Hongnem Luwang Ningthou Punshiba was the most famous and reputed king of Luwang clan. His capital was at the hill top of Luwang Makubi Ching or Luwangching situated at the west of presently Khamaran village. At his time, the village around the Luwangching was known as Pamang Khul. Hongnem Luwang Ningthou Punshiba was not only famous for his knowledge in theology, politics and art of living but was also famed for his long span of life. Luwang Ningthou Punshiba was the preceptor of Meidingu Naothingkhong and had died before the latter became king of the Kanglei. After his death, there was no competent king among the Luwangs. During the period of tenth century, Luwangs were defeated by Meidingu Chenglei Ipan Lanthaba at the Luwangee river. From this event they lost their independence completely.

Lost of Fantek independence:

This clan ruled independently at the area of Khuroi Haora Lamlangtong and their capital was at the top of the Lamlangtong hillock. This ethnic group was a sub-clan of Angom clan. Fantek Shoklaiba was the most powerful and most famous king of this group. One day, he planned to kill the Khuman king, Chingkhong Thongraibu by inviting him to a feast. But, the plan was not succeeded. To revenge this, the Khuman king attacked and defeated Fantek Shoklaiba. After defeating, they were subdued by the Khuman king and then the principality of Phantek merged into Khuman principality.

Loss of Heirem Khunjan independence:

This group of people was a sub-clan of the Luwang clan. They ruled independently and powerfully in and around Kakching Kereching. While inviting the Meidingu Thawanthaba (1195-1231) by the Khuman king Adon Punshi Yumoiba to invade against the Heirem Khunjan, the Meitei and Khuman forces jontly invaded and defeated the Heirem Khunjans. From this event, the Heirem Khunjans loss their independence and their principality was merged into the Khuman principality

Loss of Khuman independence:

This clan had their capital first at Thoubal. Then, during the reign of Khuman king Adon Laifengba, the capital of Khuman shifted to Khuman Leikoipung now called as Mayang Imphal. There, they ruled very powerfully and prosperously. During the reign of king Lamyai Kaikhiba of this clan, the nobles were divided, the Khuman domain dwindled and misery abounded. So, Lamyai Kaikhinba, no longer willing to be king of the Khumans, came to Meitei kingdom (Kanglei) and settled there. As no other Khuman ruler appeared on the scene for governance, the Meitei king, Kongyamba was compelled to occupy the Khuman territory and merged it to the Meitei administration. Thus the Khumans lost their independence.

Loss of Moirang independence:

In the process of valley unification, when all other clans and ethnic groups had come under Meitei suzerainty, the Moirangs were still retaining their independence till the late 15th century. Moirang was once a very powerful clan and had a long generation of kings who conquered several hill villages.

The Moirangs had abashed the Meitei king Punshiba at an event. But, king Punshiba could not take up any revengeful act during his short live. So, he entrusted the work of revenge to his son Ningthoukhomba. But, it as not an easy task to accomplish as Moirang was also a strong power. On the other hand, Moirang was, at that time, was a good friend with the chief of Tamu of Kabaw valley. While Ningthoukhomba invaded Moirang, the chief of Tamu would be sure to accompany with the Moirang. So, Ningthoukhomba made a skillful plan to join the chief of Tamu in the side of Meitei. After that, Ningthoukhomba invaded Moirang along with the force of Tamu chief and defeated Sanahongba, the king of Moirang. Sanahongba Ned to Mayang country. Since then, Moirang, which had been independent for centuries on end, lost its independence forever and came under Meitei suzerainty. Thus, with the loss of independence by Moirang, the formation of Meitei state in the entire valley was completed.

The culmination of state formation in the valley was a remarkable chapter in the history of Manipur. This is not only brought about a tremendous change politically, socially and economically but it also made intermarriage and matrimonial alliance among different sections of the valley people thereby bringing about similarity and affinity in the standard of living, customs, food habits culture, costume, language and speech, and etiquette. 1432 AD, the year when the state formation in the valley was completed, a very important turning point in the history of Manipur. It may be regarded as the scam between the early history of Manipur and the mediaeval history of Manipur. From the stage of internecine warfare between the clans to overpower and overthrow each other, the completion of state formation in the valley rendered the Meitei kingdom stronger, more powerful and more resourceful. Ultimately the Meiteis were quite emboldened to cross the frontier of Manipur so much so that king Kyamba of the Meitei in alliance with the king of Pong, Khekhomba, invaded Kyang Khambat, conquered it and annexed a portion of it into the Meitei Kingdom. After king Kyamba, it is on record that successive Meitei kings undertook military campaigns in the east with great display of utmost courage and heroism in large areas of land in Ava.

Continuation of state formation in the hills :

The former state formation in the valley was not done deliberately and methodically. That it was the product of time and circumstances is a fact. But the state formation in the hills was deliberately and methodically undertaken. During the State formation in the valley, the process of state formation was already undertaken in the hills also, bit by bit. From the reign of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba in 33 A.D. to 1432 A.D. when Ningthoukhomba became king, the process of integrating the hills and valley had already begun with the annexation of some surrounding hill areas. So the process of state formation in the hills can be reviewed in two ways, (i) state formation in the hills during state formation in the valley and (ii) state formation in the hills after the completion of state formation in the valley.

State formation undertaken in the hills during state formation in the valley :

The process of state formation in the hills could not be carried on along with the state formation in the valley for some centuries from the reign of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba onwards. It is on record that it started at a later period from the time of Meitei king, Loiyumba. We may take note of some events of the annexation of the hill sregions from 1074 A.D. to 1476 A.D. spanning a period from the reign of Loiyumba to the reign of Ningthoukhomba. During the reign of Loiyumba (107-1122) Nongphou Khun and Haoku were annexed. Thawanthaba who reigned from 1195 to 1231 subjugated Lanhang Khun, Tangkhul Leihopok, Marong Khun, Chingshing Khun and Ayong Haokhun. During the reign of Chingthang Lanthaba (1231-1242), Kouba Leikhampok, Kouba Koutai, etc. were annexed in the north. During the reign of Puranthaba (1247-1263), Koireng Khun was annexed. During the reign of Khumomba (1263-1278), Chingshong and Thangal were annexed. King Moiramba (1278-1302) conquered Maki Hao. He also invaded and defeated Theichep in the north. During the reign of Thangbi Lanthaba (1302-1324),Maring Khantomya in the east and Shekku Ching in the north weresubjugated. King Kongyamba (1324-1335) conquered Kongyangphaiin the west. King Telheiba (1335-1355) invaded Taiyang in Koubru and defeated it.

The Meitei king Tabungba (1359-1394) vanquished the tribals of Yangpham Chaklikpok. King Punshiba (1404-1432) defeated Tangkhul Monthou. He also fought with Koirengs in the north and conquered Koireng Khul. Again, he invaded Maring Kangngoi in the east and defeated it.

All the hills villages afore-mentioned were villages annexed during the state formation in the valley. After this, the process of state formation being completed, the process of integrating the hills and the valley made headway with the annexation of the hill villages one in the north, Tangkhul Leihoupok and Tangkhul Machipung in the after another. During the reign of Kyamba (1467-1508), Makhan Khun West East and Chingshong Khun in the north. During the reign of defeated, King Chalamba (1545-1562) vanquished Kharam, Chiru and Anal Khul in the south. King Mungyamba (1562-1997) subjugated all the tribal villages of Maram, Thangal, Lanhang. Makhan, etc, in Tuyai, Kabul Sanakhun, Lanhang Hultok, Lanhang Yangbi, Tonbi, Lamphen, Lanhang Faman were defeated. This king also defeated Mayon Khuns, Chakpa Pungpun, Chakpa Chirang. Chakpa Kharoland others in the east.

During the reign of Khagemba (1597-1652) Maram, Thangal, Maring Tangkam, Narum, Tonpung, Leiyon. Nungkhan, Tangkhul Leihoupok, Maring Khunbirok, Maring Yaotou, Maring Machi, Nongphou, Mayon, and Chakha Itok Khunjao of Tangkhul Machi were defeated. Tribal

villages of the north viz. Hankou and Mapao were also defeated. During the reign of Khunjaoba (1652-1666) Koron, Khutlang, Marong, Tureng, Maibam, Khutlai, Tonsen, Atangkul, etc. were defeated. In the north, Thingba Khun and Mayangkhang were defeated. In the south, Mahou, Langte, Tonsen, Sharon and in the east, Chakha Itok, Lenglen, Lengkhu tribal villages, were defeated.

During the reign of Paikhomba (1666-1697) tribal villages of the south like Ashong Nungkon, Lanhang, Tonsen, Shangbam, etc. were defeated. In the north, Thingba Khul was also defeated. King Charairongba (1697-1709) defeated Topang Khul. He also defeated Nunglekching, Khachung and Tusuk tribal villages in the south. King Pamheiba (1709-1748) invaded Oklu, Nungkhal, Mashen, Tokpa Khun, Karong Nongapok, Mahou, Hongtung, and the tribal villages paid tribute to the Meitei monarch. During the reign of Chouraji (1803-1813), tribal villages such as Tousand, Nungnang. Khuncharong Khunnou, Ukoklen, Tamlok, Kambiron, Mallongtai, Khongsa, etc, paid tributes to the king. Gambhir Singh, who reigned from 1825-1834 raided Ngakacheng. Okkhrul and Thonglang villages Lanfou, Choithar, Haichum and Lamlang villages offered tributes to him. He defeated Khoupum Hao, Songtan and Phatang villages. All the tribal villages of Awang Hao that were beyond the pale of Meitei suzerainty, were annexed and made to bring tributes to the king. Twenty southern tribal villages including Tuithang, Lamyang, Mangpi. Skitou, Tongka, Mete, Manong, etc, were also overrun. Most of the tribal villages offered large tributes to the king. Three Kachai Hao Villages , Thoirra, Khongtei Taloimei, Tolo, Saro, Ngachung and other villages were also overrun.

Arongmei, Thamlongmei, Oinam, Thingba Khullen and Thingba Khunou villages paid tributes to the Meitei monarch. Ipumei, Yelemmei, Ikhimei, Woinong, Iramei and, to the west of Gwai river, Kashomchi, Shanmei, Mayekmei, Katumei, Tomphamei, Katepung, Karnei, Shingamei, Makhongmei, Taranamei - all these villages were overrun by the Meitei king. When the king was camping at Makhan, Mao, Pungtongmei Khunou, Khoisukhun, Manongmei, Yang, Palulangmei, Bumei, Mao Khulen, Kashamei and Daneliding villages paid tributes to him, Pungtongmei, Iremai, Puktomei, Seremei, Isemei, Kaipungkei, Kachungmei, Mayang, Maramei, were overrun by the king after which they offered 200 cattle as tribute to him. Ishimei, Ichenmei, Tukikhimei, Upungkhokmei paid a tribute of 400 cattle to the king. The king overran Khipumei (Kohima) and Upi Tonmei gave him a tribute of 100 cattle. Khipumei paid a tribute of 100 cattle with a request to permit them to enter their village. Ngamei Khunou, Ngamei Khullen, Nga Khunou and Nga Khullen, these four villages brought a tribute of 400 cattle, one elephant tusk and 100 trugs of sesame. On the day of installing stone tablet engraved with the foot prints of the king (Gambhir Singh) at Khipumei (Kohima), Mebamechamei, Tonhoichamei, Pittemei Khunnou, Pittemei Khullen, Utuwasamei, Wathamei, Khisamei, these villages paid a tribute of 600 cattle to the king.

When king Chandrakirti was a minor, Regent Narasingh overran Sekpao. When the Regent was staying at Sekpao, he annoed Shempung, Chongpimang, Tayon and all the Khaki Hao villages. During the reign of Narasingh (1844-1850), Awang Hao Laisham, Tora, Chawai, Shomtan Phatang Khunthak, Toinem, Kachai, Okkhrun, Huining, Hundung, Choithar, Heichun, Nungsong Khunkoi, Santhak, Kasom, Khanlang, Lampui, Shokpao, Chapi Kheimi, Laiyi, Kasong, Sakoklang, Khampi Meiring, Tusom Lempi, Hangkou Ngaprum, -- all these villages were enlisted for lallup duty (a

practice of force and free labour for the king). In the expedition to realise the tribute of wax, Chongthamba Shelungba overran Ngaruphekmei and then annexed Khipumei, Heikhomei, Tehmei, Pijamtunmei, Kikemei, Khamei, Chakkhamei, Lishamei, Gashiramei, Tetchamei, Chetmei, Merengmei, Mayemei, Pashamei, Teshamei, Ngaruphengmei, etc. These hill villages brought large amounts of tributes.

During the reign of Chandrakirti (1850-1886), Tenloi, Haomit, Kaohei, Kanla, Mayeng, Khundrat were annexed and these villages paid tributes in large quantities. The five Khaki Hao villages, viz., Shennam, Longya, Kabok, Chairen and Lending offered to the king a tribute of five mithuns and one bell metal gong. Khamtong, Kangpots, Nampetsha, Hongjao, Kuhang, Lampui, Haithi, Mongba Khunnou and Khulen, Kongan, Phapheng, Langsung, Langli, Chahong, Tanhong-these 14 villages also paid tributes to the king. When the king was staying at Chibu, the Lushei Chief, Poiboi paid tribute to him. After installing the stone tablet engraved with the king's footprints at Chibu, the king annexed 14 tribal villages, namely, Warusen, Lengkham, Poiboi Mamakhun, Monbum, Labakhun, Henhingkhun, Lalakhun, Haobi Lankhun, Tantroukhun, Thingja Tumkhun, Hongngu Khun, Lamsai Khun, Pumhang and Landangluk. The six tribal villages that had not been annexed before the Meitei kingdom, viz. Tuithang, Monlong, Panlu Khunga, Purunkhut, Khonchatkhun and Haytatlampu Khun were made to pay taxes compulsorily.

Efforts to unite the hills people and plains people :

The present day territorial boundary of Manipur was the result of about 1850 year long endeavours of the erstwhile Meitei kings who successively unified the valley and gradually conquered the tribal villages of the surrounding hills. Along with the continuous process of state formation, the Meitei kings undertook several measures to establish a close and harmonious integration between the hills people and valley people. To bring about a harmonious relation between the hills people and the valley people, king Garibaniwaj (Pamheiba) made his Meitei noblemen make friends with the Tangkhuls and the Awang Haos. During the reign of Chingthangkomba, Kabui tribesmen were Luhuppa tribesmen and Kharam tribesmen. 304 Luhuppa tribesmen were settled in Purumkhul. Again 35 Kharam tribesmen were settled in Haikot. During the reign of Chourajit, some Luhuppa tribesmen were brought to Chirit Konjin and settled there. During the reign of king Narasingh, 100 Khaki Hao Khutingkai tribals were settled in Chirang. Thus, by settling the hills people in the valley, the Meitei kings tried to bridge a good relation between the hills people and plain people.

As a measure to establish a harmonious relation between the hills people and valley people, the Meitei kings held 'Mera Haochongba' in the month of Mera. In this festival, the hill people were entertained with good food. Wearing their traditional costume and decoration, they danced and performed different entertainment programmes. Also the Meitei kings caused people of different tribes to make acquaintance with one another to bring about a close relationship between different tribes. The hillmen brought their respective village produce and many costly presents for offering to the king. The Meitei kings also plied the hillmen with meat and wine and gave suitable presents so that they would return home happily with a feeling of friendly co-existence in their hearts. Moreover, the tribals were appointed to high posts to participate in the Meitei administration. This policy was a great contribution towards forging a united Manipur. Above all this, the Meitei kings

managed to establish communication between themselves and the hill people through "Haomacha Loishang' (Department of Hill tribals). A 'Lakpa' was head of this department. All the tribals who were on 'Lallup duty attended this department. The task of performing 'Mera Haochongba' festival was entrusted to this department. This department was established for the first time by king Irengba (1984-1074). Later, king Charairongba (1697-1709) revived this department with more enhancement.

Conclusion :

Today's Manipur integrating both the hills and the valley is fruit of the prolonged maneuver of about 1850 years by erstwhile Kanglei kings who assiduously brought phase by phase the different group of the valley and then the different tribes of the hills, who were all independent of one another, under a single, unique administrative system. However Manipur's geographically is small but it has a permanent territorial boundaries. It has been maintaining its unique identity till now. As such, the attempt by certain vested interests to disintegrate this age old unique integrity of Manipur is a big challenge to all the people of Manipur and is quite deplorable. To preserve the integrity of this little state, the rising generations also have a great role to play. Both the hills people and the plain people, who have lived together under a unique administrative system for several centuries, should strive to protect the integrity of Manipur for peaceful and harmonious co-existence.

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