

**Women  
of  
MANIPUR**

**G.K. Ghosh  
Shukla Ghosh**

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# WOMEN OF MANIPUR




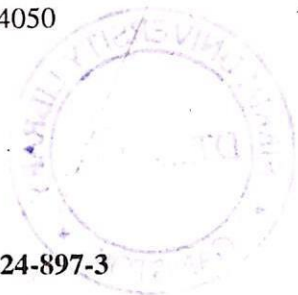
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***“Manipura Sana-Leimayol,  
Chingna Koyna Pansaba,  
Haona Koyna Panngakpa!”***

***(My Manipura, Prime of the mainland of gold, How bulworked thou art  
by the ranges of thine hills all around,  
And sentinelled by the children of nature on their round!)***

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# INTRODUCTION

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Manipur remained as a feudal state during British raj though it was not independent. It was an independent country till British occupied it. After independence along with other feudal states it was also merged.

Aryavarta fell far too short in extent to enfold it. So did Bharatavarsha of later ages. Hence the Hindu puranas locate it within the kiratadesa. It was however, a "Suvarnabhu" or Land of Gold, and formed geographically, a part of "Suvarnabhu" of old so as to indicated by an old name of its, namely "Sanapung" which means "Land of Cold". Further, its own history together with foreign accounts, best evidences that this tract of land was a gold-producing country and that it had its own gold currency once.

The term Manipur however a Hindunised term which was introduced after 1734 AD when bulk of Meithei embraced Vaisnav cult of Hinduism. To them however it was known as "Meithei Laipak" or the land of Meithei or "Kangleipak" or royal land.

Manipur is a hill-girt tract of land. The girding hills not only delineate its march but wall it off from the adjoining regions into a distinct geographical entity. So is the feature, none of them ventured to deny it an independent territorial existence. It remained as inter-territorial state between the two regions now known as Myanmar and Assam.

It is, as it were, a labyrinth carved out of nature. The border hills not only make it hilled all round but shoot out off shoots inward. They form themselves into manifold ranges and run far into the interior till they cover eleven-twelfths of the whole extent of its surface and leave only a strip of land for a valley to be lengthwise from north to south. This valley which is the metropolis was quite safe and secure from foreign inroads as the approaches hereto were only through glens and defiles wherein non but glendoveers could pace firm and secure.

So, it had the opportunity to grow in power, make it felt far and wide and shine in full sovereign splendour from the earliest times until recently time wrought a change in its fortune and doomed it to lose its sovereignty in 1981, at the hands of British at the battle of Khomjam and form consequently a part of Indian India of the British regime.

This tract lies at a cross-road. Every down rush of races from the north towards Indo-China and India in early times used to leave in this soil a remnant each. So did every onrush of people from India and outside towards Indo-China and Indonesia. Every uprush of humanities from Indonesia towards India followed suit. So, the land became, at the dawn of history, may before its dawning, the homeland of several races whether akin or alien. In other words, batches of several peoples from different stocks of humanity loitered in their early movements to settle here in this soil. Some of them preferred the hills to the valley and lived isolated lives rearing, of course, with a jealous care, this respective tradition in its full primitive splendour and left the present tribals to represent them in the modern world. Of the rest, those who occupied the prime of the valley, had to enter into an age-long struggle against one another for self-preservation. Absorption of the weaker by the stronger went on in consequence for a long time. Only seven strongest powers, namely, the Ningthoujas, the Angoms, the Luwangs, the Khumans, the Moirangs, the Khaba-Nganbas and the Chengleis, who were already hybrids, survived only to interbreed themselves into ever the more a hybrid nationality into the so called Metheis, the three fold aspects of whose national life forms the main theme of the country's history. The Loi is not recognised as a pure Manipuri (or Methei). They appear to be descendants of the eighth group which was akin to Moirangs which formally occupied the Valley to the south. They were formerly independent but were reduced ages ago by the Metheis; hence the names Lois or subdued which was given to them after subjugation. They profess to be Hindus, but are not recognised as such by the orthodox. There was system of punishment in which a Manipuri could be degraded to be Loi by banishing him to a Loi village. It was also reported that Chinese prisoners of war during the rule of King Khagemba were also settled in Loi villages who taught the art of sericulture and silk. The Bishnupriyas are Indo-Aryan settled in Manipur mostly around Bishnupur since ages. The ancestors of the Muslim families of Manipur came at different times from Srihatta and



Cachar. They are known as Poggens. They took Manipuri wives and settled in Manipur adopting Meithei as their mother tongue.

The book deals about women of Manipur belonging to various communities. These women are born with unique talent of creativity and hardwork. In various chapters that follows, the book discusses about these women, their skill, social life, policy and so on to give a holistic picture. It may help us to draw action plan for Manipuri women and their background may also help us to draw action plan for women of various other states and countries.

5th March '96  
Calcutta-700 028.

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## Chapter 1

# COMMUNITIES MANIPUR

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In order that various aspects of women be spoken out, it is necessary that we must study about various communities since each community have their own social order that influences women by and large. Various aspects of women including the skill also varies considerably though each community complements each other to many extent.

Though during recent past geographical importance of various communities gradually loosing the ground with settlement of various communities in and around Imphal, ethnically and traditionally these communities grow with their geographical area, in isolation or not. This preserved their culture and social order upto certain extent inspite of influence of Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Therefore the communities be first categorised according geographical settlement.

Broadly, the people of Manipur be divided into two classes such as—

- (1) Those settled in valleys
- (2) Those settled on hills

In each geographical regions as above there are several communities having their own culture, social order and polity. Meithei community dominates in demography so far as people settled on the valleys are concerned. They are of Mongoloid origin and speak a dialect that branched out from Tibeto-Burman stock. They normally profess Vaisnav cult of Hinduism, simultaneously professing their own traditional religious normally referred to as "Snamahi cult". In fact they embarrassed Hinduism from 1734 AD when a Vaisnav saint called Santidas Gosain baptized their king Garib Niwaj to new faith. But they did not banish the traditional faith and celebrated their own

festival also. Only change that took place was their food habits after march of Hinduism as they discontinued taking beef and meat. They have their own language and had their own script but after influence of Hinduism they adopted the Bengali script for expressions. The Lois are more or less from same or similar stock. They speak a dialect which is basically the archaic form of Meithei dialect. They declare themselves as Hindus but in comparison to the Meitheis the influence is much less. In other words they practice more of Senamahi cult than Vaisnav cult. In addition they also have their own deities and rituals like stone worship, ancestor worship etc., more akin to tribal form of nature worship. Due to less influence of Hinduism their food habits continued almost as before. Their social order etc., are some where between the tribal form and Meithei form. The Poggens or the Manipuri muslims though had different ancestors had adopted Meithei language as their own. but in respect of their rituals, society, way of living food habits or even dress upto certain extent Islamic influence can not be ruled out. Unlike Vaisnav Meitheis who continued their pre-Hindu Snamahi cult even after conversion to Hinduism, Poggens on the other hand follow only Islamic cult though they are not as communal or as strict fundamentalists like Muslims elsewhere. Rather their attitude to society around is rather soft. In contrast to above communities, the Bishnupriyas are infact the Indo-Aryan people. Their language though have influence of Tibeto-Burman Meithei dialect, but basically a Indo-Aryan dialect more akin to Assamese or Bengali. They also use Bengali script to express. They practice Hinduism but rarely follow Snamahi cult though influence of the cult can not be totally ruled out. There are various legends of their origin. While the Meitheis feel their ancestors were from Bengal, the Bishnupriyas feel they came as a group before the Meitheis came. However, whatever may be the legend or story of their migration, they are no doubt a separate group and are neither had either Bengali or Assamese ancestors. At the most there might have been some mix up through marriage like the Meitheis. It might be that they are the branch of first group of Aryans, like Kalitas of Assam who had to come to North Eastern India due to onslaught of second group of Aryans led by Parasuram. There is another class called Lairikyengbum who are considered as writers. They do not wear the sacred thread and still retain the Bengali titles like Basu and Das. But in other respects they have now been absorbed into the general mass of the Meithei population. The ancestors of the Brahmin families came and settled at different times in Manipur mostly from Bengal. At present their marriages are confined to their own caste. But formerly

they used to inter-marry with the other Meitheis who considered themselves as Kshatriyas after Hindu influence. Marriage beyond caste however does not entail loss of caste. In spite of their inter-marriages, the Brahmins still have distinct recognisable features. They enjoy a very high position in Manipur. They normally do not practice Snamahi cult. They still use Brahmin surnames at the end like Sharma, Chakravarty; Mukherjee, Banerjee etc. At the same time they use Meithei surnames called Yamnaks as prefix.

The Meithei society is further subdivided into seven groups termed as Saleis. The seven Saleis are Ningthouja, Angom, Luwang, Khuman, Moirang, Khab-Nganba and Chenglei. Each Saleis, again subdivided into several Yamnaks, in some cases more than hundred. The Meitheis use their Yamnaks as a prefix to their name which may be considered as the surnames. After Hindu influence they use Hindu surnames like Singh, Sharma, Chakraborty etc., as suffix. Like most of the Meitheis all other communities like the Lois, the Bishnupriya and even the Brahmins identify themselves with various Yamnaks and Saleis. Those who descended from the royal family use Raj Kumar or Raj Kumari or Maharaj Kumar or Maharaja etc., as prefix and do not use any other Yamnak. All these people belong to Ningthouja Salei. There is no caste restriction about marriage match but a Raj Kumar or Maharaj Kumar can not marry a Raj Kumari or Maharaj Kumari. Poggens or Muslims however do not identify with Yamnaks or Saleis.

The sons of the hill, though considered as different stock are basically Tibeto-Burman group like the Meitheis. Though there is vast difference in the life-style and social structure between the Meitheis and those who live on the hills, there are considerable similarity too. Perhaps during some remote past they had common ancestors, and variation if any is due to social changes during subsequent period including influence of Hinduism and Christianity.

People living on hills or Manipur belonging to various tribes may be broadly be divided into three groups such as

- (1) Naga group
- (2) Old Kuki group
- (3) New Kuki group

Each group consist of various tribes. Those tribes belong to first group one.

(1) The Tangkhul (2) The Rangmei (Kabui), (3) The Lingmei (or Kacha Naga) (4) The Zemi (5) The Mao (or Paomata), (6) The Maram, (7) The Thangal (8) The Quirengs, (9) The Angami (10) The Sema. The tribes Rangmei, the Lingmei and the Zemi together often referred to as Zeliangrong. Similarly, the second group also consist of several tribes like (1) The Maring (2) The Anal (3) The Monsang (4) The Langang (5) The Moyon. The third group is New Kuki group or Kuki-Chin group. The tribes belonging to this group are (1) The Aimol (2) The Chothe (3) The Chiru (4) The Kom (5) The Purum (6) The Gangte (7) The Paite (8) The Simte (9) The Thadou (10) The Vaiphei (11) The Hmar (12) The Zou (13) The Ralte (14) Any Mizo tribe like Lushai etc. Ethnologically they belong to the Kuki Chin family.

The Zemis, Liangmeis and Rengmeis are allied tribes together known as Zeliangrong and live in the Tamenglong sub-division in the western hills of Manipur, The Mao (or Paomata), the Maram and the Thangals live in the northern sub-division of Mao and Sadar hills bordering Nagaland. They are often referred to as quasi-Angami tribes due to their similarity with the Angami tribe. The Angami and the Sema also live close to Nagaland. The Tangkhuls live in the Ukhrul district adjacent to Myanmar. The Marings, the Moyon, the Monsang, the Langang and the Anals occupy the Tengenoupal district in the south-west bordering Myanmar New Kuki group live in the Sadar hills, Jiribum sub-division, Churachandrapur and Tengenoupal districts of Manipur. They are also found settled the clusters in various other places like Sekmai in north, Ukhrul districts and so on.

According to Col J. Shakespeare the so called old Kuki tribes came to Manipur from the hills south of Manipur in Myanmar in the 16th century. The so called new Kuki tribes came to Manipur in the 18th and 19th century A.D. Large scale immigration of the Kuki tribes in Manipur in the 19th century is on record. Tribes living in the chin-hills of Myanmar are still coming in and settling down in southern Manipur. During the last few decades a large number of Mizos have migrated into this state and settled down in Churachandpur.

Of the three groups of tribes in Manipur the Naga tribes have ethnic and cultural affinities with the people of Nagaland and other

two groups have affinity with Chins of Myanmar and the Mizos of the Mizoram. All these tribes belonging to three groups have their kith and kin scattered in Cachar, Assam valley and upper Myanmar. Many tribal villages sprang up in the Imphal valley also. The recent trend among the educated and well-to do people belonging to various Naga tribes is to own houses in Imphal to enjoy amenities of modern city life. The Kuki-chin tribes have their maximum concentration in Churachandrapur which is fast developing into a modern township, and in order of importance second only to Imphal, the capital city. Bulk of the tribes embraced Christianity, after Rev. Pettigrew introduced it since 1894 AD. But inspite of such conversion their traditional beliefs continued including drinking rice beer, dress, customs or even certain rituals. None of them have their script but started using Roman script after influence of Christianity. Only evil ritual that was discontinued after influence of Christianity was head-hunting. Literacy rate also increased at galloping rate due to influence of Christianity.

## Chapter 2

# REVOLUTION BY WOMEN OF MANIPUR

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Women of Manipur belonging to all the groups have many qualities which shall be discussed later. But what is more worth mentioning is that these women has valour to fight social evil, to create revolution and can protect interest of motherland to fight war if the country faces such eventualities. Revolution here does not mean social revolution alone but warfare also.

Manipur was ruled by a royal dynasty supposed to have been founded by mythical Pakhangba some remote past having connections of Indian epic Mahabharata or even with Manipur mythical figure Guru Atya Sidaba. This dynasty continued to rule till the crown had its importance down till Indian independence. The history describes many brave kings like Khagemba, Mongyamba, Marangba and so on.

Around early 15th century Manipur was ruled by Ningthou Khomba, belonging to same dynasty. He was also described as a brave king who fought many wars even with mighty Burma, Assam or Cachar. But what need to be noted here is his queen was equally brave and known for warfare.

Once the king proceeded to east to resist an invading Burmese force. In his absence the Tangkhuls came down from the hills and attacked the unprotected capital. Queen Linthoi-Ngambi with other women bravely fought against them and eventually succeeded in driving them away. This was one of the earliest description of bravery of women of Manipur.

Around 18th Century, Manipur throne was adorned by one of the greatest King Pamheiba. He was baptised into Vaisnavism by Shantidas Gosain who came from Srihatta through Cachar belonging to Ramanandi cult. After accepting new faith he assumed the title

Garib Niwaz and declared Hinduism as royal religion instructing his subjects to accept the new faith. He was a brave king who fought many successful wars. But towards end he met a tragic end as he and his eldest son Shyam Shah was killed by his second son Ajit Shah who occupied the throne. But after a few years of rule there was another coup as the third son of Garib Niwaz, Bharat Shah could defeat Ajit Shah who had to leave Manipur to take shelter in Cachar. These coups and counter coups continued till Gour Shah, the eldest son Shyam Shah ascended the throne alternately with his younger brother Jai Singh more popular as Bhagyachandra Karta. In a subsequent incidence Jai Singh was banished from Manipur who had to take shelter in Rangpur, the capital of Assams Ahom dynasty. With the help of the Ahom ruler Swargadeo Rajeswar Singh, Jai Singh could occupy the throne of Manipur again. The relation between the two dynasties grew and Swargadeo Rajeswar Singh subsequently married princess Kuranganayani, daughter of Gour Shah. Meanwhile Burmese army occupied Manipur which was restored back to Jai Singh with the help of Swargadeo Rajeswar Singh.

After marriage Kuranganayani by dint of her merit shortly occupied the position of the Chief Queen. Shortly after marriage Kuranganayani excavated a tank and made an establishment at the village of Manaimji in the Sarucharai forest where the Mainipuris forming part of the marriage settlement were allowed to live.

After the death of Swargadas Rajeswar Singh, there was Moamaria rebellion and Moamaria leader Ragha Maram could usurp the throne depriving Swargadeo Lakshmi Singh. But finally Kuranganayani bravely fought to kill Moamaria leader Ragha Maram and thus the rule of Ahom dynasty could be restored. This is another example of valour of a Manipuri women.

There was many ups and downs in the history of Manipur. Meithei women might have took part in various uprisings but in absence of record it could not be discussed here. However, we may discuss here a full-fledge women revolt that shook administration to the considerable extent.

*Source* ✓ By end of 19th century, British Government could occupy Manipur after failure of Manipur in a war known as Khomjam Lal. British Government gave Manipur a feudal status but virtually the



country was subjugated. Maharaja Churachand Singh became ruler of Manipur basically as agent of British. During the end of Maharaja Churachand's reign the second world war broke out in 1938. Some clever businessmen, in order to make a good profit by artificially raising the prices, began to hoard rice to monopolise the trade. The effect was felt very soon. The consumers were hard hit. This time women of Manipur formed a group and revolted. This revolution was recorded as Nupi Lal. Initially administration supported the hoarders to suppress Nupi Lal. But finally the revolt was successful and Government had to take action against the hoarders and profiteers.

A similar movement was also recorded in Manipur identical to Nupi Lal but with a different objective. During the decade of 80's and early 90's, women of Manipur formed groups to revolt against alcohol and drugs addiction. Though we had democratic Government during the period, the administration was reluctant initially to take action against drug and alcohol racket, and in turn tried to suppress the women revolt. But finally they had to give way for good cause and women became winners again to set an example for others to follow.

Nagas and both the Kuki group of tribes before embracing Christianity used to follow their own set of religion varying to some extent from tribe to tribe. Broadly it may be considered as nature worship or often referred to as Animism. Meithei or Manipuris used to socially accept them as their brethren till during the reign of Maharaja Chandra Kirti Singh they were declared as untouchables. It was after that the conflict started. Later Meithei encouraged migration of Kukis and used them as buffer against Nagas to suppress any revolt by the Naga tribes individually or jointly as the case may be. This caused a permanent clash between Nagas and old Kukis on one hand and new Kukis on the other which continued even today as the newspapers often report.

Zemai, Liangma and Rongma Nagas speak identical languages having identical cultural traditions. Whatever their tradition may be, it is said that they were inextricably the descendants of the three brothers of the same parents who had probably migrated from Tibet or Western China and Myanmar to their present areas through Mao territory after a short period of settlement at a place called "Abari" near Khumai village. These tribes lived in different areas but adjacent to each other, living in their village states under their petty kings

independent of each other except at times to have a joint fight against any aggressors.

In the 17, 18 and early 19 centuries the Zemais, Liangmais and Rongmais fought the Kacharis who were expanding their angle of rule from their capital, Dimapur over the other neighbouring countries before they were thrown off by the powerful martial Ahoms. They also resisted bravely and unitedly the expansion of the Meithei Kingdom, encroaching in the southern part of their country. But the appearance of the British on the scene of the region after the Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26) in the wake of expansion of the Burmese imperialism brought to an end of all the conquest designs of the Kacharis, Assamese and Meitheis.

Under such background a great man called Haipou Jadonang (born 1905) appeared in the scene during early part of 20th century. Jadonang was 5'4" tall, thin, but gentle, religious sensitive, proud and incorruptable. At the same time, he was endorsed with strong individuality, integrity, honesty and broad-mindedness. He was born as a farmer Rongmei family of modest lineage at a Kambiron (Puiron) village situated at the top of the hill over looking the Barak river where the Manipur-Cachar road passed between the two elevated portions of the spur.

Haipou Jadonang appeared as messiah for the Nagas organised three allied tribes Zemai, Liangmai and Rongmai into unified force as Zeliangrong group. He referred Animism or nature worship into a modern religion by introducing code of ethics and by removing superstitions. Thereafter he brought other Naga tribes under his leadership to fight against British Raj and at the same time fought against expansion of Christianity. He was ably supported by a young girl Gaidinliu later known as Rani Gaidinliu and this movement called "Haraka" movement slowly got in touch with mainstream freedom movement of India. He dreamt Pan-Asiana a thought which could be achieved upto limited extent with formation of SAARC, much after his death. But British administration could foresee the danger in Jadonang thus finally in a fabricated case he was hanged at Imphal on Saturday 29 August, 1931 at 6 A.M, leaving behind a legacy of struggle.

After death of Jadonang the leadership of "Haraka" movement fell on Rani Gaidinliu. This young girl grew into a respected lady

amidst of struggle. She fought bravely against British administration frequently going to jail, as part of freedom struggle though she was not recognised to the extent she sacrificed nor was rewarded. After independence her struggle continued against Christianity and against anti-national activities of underground Nagas but instead of supporting her, our administration often put her behind the bar till she was allowed to leave peacefully at Kohima by Nagaland Government headed by J.B. Jashokie. With Gaidinliu a number of young girls of Zeliangrong group joined and it may be stated that it is a long history of valour of Manipuri Naga girls.

The soil of Manipur witnessed a number revolts such as Kuki rebellion from December 1917 onwards that started from Mombi village, a number of Naga rebellion during and after British period. History do not record the name of any women except Rani Gaidinliu discussed earlier since these revolts were mostly collective revolts though names of the leaders, mostly men, were often mentioned. But participation of women either directly or indirectly can not be ruled out since without participation of women no revolt can be sustainable. Therefore there could be a number of brave women in various communities who remained unnamed. But there is no doubt that women of Manipur do have unequal valour.

## Chapter 3

# DRESS OF MANIPUR WOMEN

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As already discussed we can not say Manipuri as a single community. There are various groups believing in various faiths with varied culture. All these background have definite impact on their dress. Therefore while discussing about the dress, it is to discuss separately for various groups. We may start discussing with Meithei including Lois being the major group.

The dress of the Meithei women when of good quality is picturesque and pleasing. During the hot weather it consists of a piece of cloth open except at the bottom, where it is stitched together by the edges for a few inches; this is folded round the body, under the armpits and over the breast, and tucked in by the hand by the side of the body. In length it reaches the ground, but as this would be inconvenient in walking, it is hitched up about half way to the knee, and tucked in again at the waist. This piece of cloth, called a "Phanek", is only wide enough to go one and a half times round the body; this gives enough room, however, for the legs in walking. The "Phanek" is made in cotton and silk, and the only patterns are stripes of various colours and widths running across the material, the groundwork being of different colours. The commoners patterns are red with green stripes, green and black, blue with black and white stripes, yellow and brown, dark blue with green and white stripes etc. At the top and bottom of the garment is a broad margin, on which geometrical figures or patterns of various kinds are sewn by hand with floss silk in various colours. Over the Phanek is worn a white sheet, known as "In-na-phi", which is folded in the usual native manner, the face, however, being left uncovered. In the cold seasons a short jacket with long sleeves is worn, this reaches below the bust over the Phanek and is worn tight fitting. The material is usually velvet or satin black, blue or green being the favourite colours. The great drawback to this dress in a

European's eyes is its tendency to spoil the figure; the whole weight of the Phanek resting on the bust soon ruins the shape. Female children, until puberty, or near it, wear the Phanek round the waist, the upper part of the body being bare.

Women are not allowed to wear chaddars embroidered with gold either in presence of king or elsewhere without permission.

The religious festivals, such as "Lai haraoba" are occasions when the sumptuary laws are a little relaxed, and women done their gayest apparel without let or hindrance. Those who have been selected to take a part in one of the religious dances wear a handsome costume which is as modest as it is also beautiful, and which is sanctioned by long custom of these occasions. Old women make a living by hiring out these costumes, for they cost too much for ordinary purses to buy outright, and the appreciation of their charm. The headgear, is a small skull cap of black cloth or velvet, with a narrow band of pearl trimming at the edge, sometimes they wear an ornamental branching spray of white imitation pearl beads on the cap. The jacket is close fitting, and is of black cloth or velvet, with gold trimming about two inches deep on the sleeves, which do not reach down to the elbow. A white cloth is wound tightly round the waist from under the waist from under the breasts just over the hips to give support. The petticoat is made of silk, either green or dark red and at the bottom is a band of sequin ornamentation eighteen inches to two feet in depth. Over the shoulder and round the waist is fastened a decorative ornament which can only be compared to *subretasche* with a shoulder strap. On a groundwork of red silk or satin, they sew round, oval, or square pieces of glass silvered, set in gold and silver tinsel, with loose fringed ends of the same bright materials. Over the silk skirt they wear a top-skirt of white delicate *muslin*, hand woven, on which are sewn rows and rows of silver tinsel, till the whole is a mass of gorgeous splendour, reflecting the light on all directions, as the agile creatures whirl around and sink down in ecstatic worship of Radha Krishna, in whose honour they dance.

The "Faichareng", a cap worn by ladies of high rank, is first mentioned in the year 1746 AD, when the Queen, the wife of the Raja Pamheiba or Garib Niwaz, wore it at a dancing party given by the Chothe Nagas in their village.

In dress the Lois are not distinguishable from Meitheis. The women wear the same costume. These remarks are also true of the Poggens or Muslims, with the difference that the Poggen women wear Phaneks, which they fasten under the right breast, while Meithei women fasten this garment under the left breast. The colour of the Phaneks of Poggen women differ from those used by Meitheis, as, for instance, the green used by a Meithei will be darker, less glaring than the shade of green allowable to the Poggan.

A unique Phanek worn by Meithai and Loi women during festive occasion is "Moirang phee". It is known for its unique colour combinations and design. It is said that it was designed and first used by legendary Thoibi of Khamba-Thoibi episode.

As already told Bishnupriyas are basically Indo-Aryan people of Manipur with certain influence of Meithei elements on their way of life. Therefore this impact created a unique dress for Bishnupriya women of their own. Unmarried girls used to wear two pieces of garments during first part of this century. The principal garments hung from the waist and the second was used to tighten the breast. For the married women, the principal garment used to hang from the breast, and another, equally big but finer from the head over the back. Towards the first quarter of this century, the piece of cloth used by unmarried girls to tighten their breasts was replaced by the blouse, and the married women also began to use blouses in addition. During this time, the blouse of "Khermaci", or velvet ornamented by dots of line, later on, by "camadi", a kind of fine tin plates, was very popular. At the next stage, i.e. during the forties of this century unmarried girls began to use chaddars in addition. The principal garments for women is of two kinds. The ordinary type of garment is called "Analury" or "Lanau", a single coloured coarse cloth with laces on both sides lengthwise, while the other type of garment, the more gorgeous one, is called "Telaphati" or "Caksabi" which is also a coarse cloth with length wise stripes and embroidered on both sides lengthwise.

Hill people of Manipur mostly tribes wear different types of dresses. The three groups discussed earlier wear different types of design which in many case varies from tribe to tribe even within the tribes. Therefore it is not possible to discuss about details of designs but the dresses are discussed in generals.

First major tribal group of Manipur is the Naga group. Out of Naga group, the group of tribals like Mao (Paomata), Maram, Quoireng, Tangkhul etc., dominate who are akin to Nagas of Nagaland particularly Angami group like Angami, Sema, Lotha, Chakhesang etc. Mao or Paomata tribe lives bordering Nagaland.

Mao girls wear two garments, one of which may be regarded as worn for effect only as it consists of a plain square of cloth, often dark blue or black with red border, hang round the neck over the bosom. The skirt descends to the knee which it barely covers. Older women wrap themselves up in a white rug which is thrown apparently without any method. Some ladies also wear their traditional petticoats. Many clothes are found with small geometrical patterns, which is supposed to be signature or trade mark of the weaver or which may be luck mark of magical origin. Like any other tribes of the region the Mao tribe also use shawl having typical design of their own which can be identified easily by others as Mao shawl although marked influence of Angami designs may be visible. Mostly they use red, black, orange, green colours etc., for shawl mostly striped design. The dress of Maram women are also similar to those of Maos except variation of designs and colours. The women of Quoireng tribe wear several kinds of petticoats, all of which are made at home like their cousins. The general colouring is white background. Style of wearing dress amongst the Tangkhul girls is identical to their cousins. But details of their design varies. They mostly prefer drab red colour though less bright is soothing.

The Rongmei women wear a piece of cotton cloth of thick texture, which is put on the same way as the Methei Phanek, and reaches to the little below the knees. This garment is confined round the waist by a coloured scarf of fringed ends. The colour for ordinary wear is usually of a muddy hue, with coloured stripes of various widths; on holding the blue with red stripes is the favourite colour. Over the shoulders is worn a scarf shaped piece of cloth, generally of blue, with a border and fringe of other colours. Very little need to be added to this account but it may be of interest to note that the Phanek or long petticoat is fastened under the right breast while a Methei woman fastens under the left breast. On gala days or festive occasions the ordinary plain fashions are supplanted by elaborate costumes. The girls often wear small caps made of blue cloth. The petticoats are often of red, black and white stripes, with small geometrical patterns

worked in the value of cloth is enhanced by these patterns. The Zemes and the Liangmei girls wear identical dresses with modest variation of design and colour. The Zeme women wear a piece of cloth known as Arnemang is worn round the upper portion of the body effectively covering the breast. A kind of shawl known as Peningum hangs down from the shoulders.

Old Kuki group adopted different designs for their dresses than Nagas or new Kukies of Mizos. Dominating tribe among this group is the Anals. The normal dress of the Anal women is an underwear skirt known as "Harsunho" and a long shawl covering from breast to knee known as "Lungwin" and a type of blouse known as "Lungam". The two twin tribes Mayon and Monsang also use identical dresses but are more elaborately embroidered like new Kuki group, perhaps may be because they might have come later to retain more of Kuki origin. In contrast the dress of Maring women is much simpler with negligible embroidery but they have interest for use of elaborate ornaments.

The dress of new Kuki group is found to be elaborate. The design of dress is almost identical in respect of all the tribes of this group with minor variations. Thadou tribe perhaps is the dominating tribe of this group in Manipur followed by Gangte, Paite, Poi, Lushei and other Mizo tribes like Hmar, Ralte etc. The Thadou women wear a loin cloth which is wrapped around their waist and reaches a little over half way down their thighs. Attached to the cloth, sometimes separately, is a string which is passed around the waist and so holds it up. In addition they wear a breast cloth which is wrapped tight around their torso, the outer corner being tucked in at the top at a spot between the left breast and the armpit. Sometimes an additional wrapper is used thrown over the shoulders thus completing their wardrobe. It may be noted that Thadou women are careful to cover the breasts until they have borne a child, after which it does not matter exposing them. The same rule is observed by other tribes of this group. Thadous settled around Churachandrapur of Manipur had the tradition of producing woollen cloth. Both men and women have also a kind of woollen jumper which is crudely made. It consists of two strips of cloth about 1.5 meters by 25 cm. These are stitched together leaving an unstitched gap for the head to go. The sides of this chest and back protector are again stitched together leaving a gap in the centre of each for the arms. The wrappers or shawls are commonly used by



both men and women. They may be white or dark indigo blue. The white ones usually have a black band at the extremities while the blue ones have some embroidery work in place of those bands. The indigo dye is obtained from the plant *Strobilanthes flaccidocolius* that grows wild. The type of embroidery or design is chosen according to achievement of the person who wears it. The Lushei tribe of this group have most elaborate designs which Lushei of Mizoram could develop which has percolated over the period of time to other tribes of this group settled in Manipur. The cloth or fabric they wear is known as "Puan". A Puan is normally about a yard in length and from 44" to 54" in breadth. They did not have in the beginning any use of coloured yarn and so the cloth produced used to be a simple thick white piece for both male and female. Another piece bigger in size used as wrapper. These puans used to be conspicuous by the absence of any other colour for quite a long time and these were called "Puango". In course of time they discovered that certain barks, roots, herbs and leaves could yield fast black colour. Naturally, therefore, came the use of black borders on their tunics, while some of them were made entirely of black surface with thin white stripes, producing thereby desirable variations in their earlier simple white cloth. As time wore on, they discovered other colours and thus came the use of red, yellow, green and blue colours on their cloth. But soon their artistic talents encouraged them to promote designs and the earliest design they made was named "Kawkpuizikzial". This was produced in the likeness of one of their very common leafy vegetables. These leaves have their tips curled nicely in small round loops and this produced the motif for the typical Mizo-Kuki design. Once design making came into vogue, fresh ones were devised in quick succession and the puans started to take their names on the basis of the designs used therein. Thus the next design in common use came to be known as "Disul". These two designs were soon followed by more intricate ones which, coupled with various colour combinations, led ultimately to the production of extremely beautiful Puans with fresh names till the best among them known as "Puanchei" came into great prominence. As far as it has been possible to locate, as many as fifty-two traditional puans appear to be still in existence.

During earlier periods the puans were their only garments. These were used by men and women, more or less in the same fashion. In the beginning they all had just one piece, one end of which was held on the left arm while putting on the dress. The cloth was then taken

round the waist from the back side, the other end brought under the right aimpit and placed on the left shoulder, thus giving a cover to the whole body. The flaps of the cloth were so arranged in this process that these provided security against slipping down from the body. At the next stage they started to use two pieces. Gradually, cloth for the lower garment became much broader which necessitated sewing up of two pieces into one. It was also from this time that the way in which the puans were worn by men and women began to differ. The women's lower garment became much wider thereby giving a full coverage to their lower part from the waist gradually below the knee upto half of the leg. For the upper garment, the women used have one corner of the puan tucked up securely on the right waist, carried it over the left shoulder and brought it back to the right in such a way that the whole body was covered nicely.

The date of change of dresses were never mentioned in any chronicles not to speak of tribals who do not have any chronicle at all due to absence of script. In fact, most of the history written elsewhere also were incomplete which only gives accounts of events but rarely social changes or dresses. This leaves a vacuum to give us any complete picture. Nevertheless, various impacts from outside did influence the dress of women of Manipur down the history. In case of women while changes continued, element of tradition retained.

One of the change that was noticed due to improved communication was style of wearing Phanek, the traditional attire of Meithei women. From the traditional way of wearing as described before, the first change was to wear in the style Mekhala worn by women of Assam. Only difference being instead of Muga mekhala worn waist and below, Meitheis worn their traditional Phanek but a matching blouse and a half saree or chaddar is worn across the body. This new three piece dress was drawn from various tradition. While Phanek remained from their tradition, style from Assam, the half saree of 2.5 metres in length often brought from West Bengal or smuggled from South East Asia, mostly printed silk, or a saree cut into two pieces being shared by two women. Only during festive occasion they continue to wear in their traditional style with a fine muslin Chadder "In-na-phi" thrown backward the neck, or worn like Chaddar. Urbanites however wear blouse in addition. The second change that was observed was wearing of saree bought from other Indian states. Though worn rarely even today, the sarees of various designs are becoming

increasingly popular. The changes however comparatively slower in respect of the Loi women and faster among the Bishnupriya women due to their silchar connections. Modern winter garments are getting popularity at faster rate particularly knitted wear of various designs and style. They have started wearing knitted blouse, cardigans etc., adopting even western style worn over their "Phanek" due to convenience to work and easy mobility. Many Methei women picked up knitting in addition to their traditional weaving skill. However, western dresses like jeans, shirts etc., yet to be accepted since to many they are considered as obscene.

Though living in remote areas, change of style of dress among tribals of all three groups changed rather at a galloping rate. They adopted western style at least upto certain extent due to influence of christianity. The first change of style that was noticed was to adopt western bridal attire instead of their traditional bridal dress during marriage. In case of day to day wear, while they continue to wear their traditional dress from waist down below for the upper portion of the body they switched over to western style wearing jackets, blouse etc. During winter also use of knitted wear were noticed. Shawl of traditional style were worn only on certain festive occasions or get together. In may occasions even the bottom dress were replaced by silk lungis made of Thai or Burmese silk that was smuggled through the Indo-Myanmar border. The latest change that is increasingly noticed among college going girl being wearing of jeans and shirts or even jackets exactly like western girls, Most of these jeans were marketed by various reputed organised sector organization situated at various places of our country through their franchise. As world becoming smaller and smaller due to better communication style and fashions changing faster thus dress has to change. It is a part of global impact on our society, Manipur is no exception. But in the process its own design should not get lost since it has aesthetic sense that may not be noticed in many other land.

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