

DYNAMIC OF SALAIS UNION AND MEITEI FORMATION: HISTORICAL APPROACH

DR. OINAM RANJIT SINGH*

**Associate Professor, Department of History, Bodoland University, Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam-783370 (India)*

ABSTRACT

Manipur, the ancient kingdom, the easternmost outpost of Indian culture and civilization, is a small state with beautiful hills and green valley with its sparkling lakes and glittering rivers. It is bounded on the east by the Surma tract and the upper Chindwin district of Myanmar, on the south by the Lushai Hills and Myanmar, on the west by the Cachar district of Assam and on the north by Nagaland state. Historical evidences show that the territory of Manipur was much bigger than that of the present. The indigenous ethnoses in Manipur came from outside, probably from the East and the South-East Asian regions at different periods of time and in successive waves of migrations. The ethnoses of Manipur linguistically, racially, pre-historically show a close similarity to the East and South-East Asians. The language spoken by them belong to the Tibeto-Burman sub-family of the Tibeto-Chinese (Sino-Tibetan) family of languages. The origin of the Meitei, the major ethnic group of Manipur, is still in obscurity as varied theories, propositions; views and opinion have been postulated and propounded by many scholars. The term Meitei came into existence in the process of cultural and political absorption of numerous Salais into the Ningthouja power which came to be known as Meitei. The tribe Meitei in all probability, meant the Ningthouja Salai (clan).

Keyword: *Ningthouja, Angom, Luwang , Khuman, Moirang , Khaba-Nganba and Sarang-Leishangthem.*

INTRODUCTION:

Manipur, known through various names in the region between South Asia and South-East Asia, history records its existence as a sovereign Asiatic kingdom since ancient times. Known as *Kathe* to the Burmese, *Meklee* to the Ahoms, *Mooglei* or *Moglai* to the Cacharies, *Cassey* to the Shans, the people of this land have undergone several ordeals in the course of its long drawn civilizational history. Historically evolved practices over the centuries

exhibit unique civilizational trends in its socio-economic and cultural milieu. Confluence and convergence of various cultural crosscurrents vis-a-vis the interactions with neighbouring civilizations produced a systematic economic, social and cultural system. Its geographical location provided the basis of a functional stand point in terms of historic silk route traversing China, Myanmar and present Bangladesh. In fact, the written history of Manipur dates back to the time of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, the first historical king of Manipur who had ascended the throne in 33 AD. It came under British colonial rule following the Anglo-Manipuri war, 1891 AD (Gangmumei Kabui, 1991:1& Jyotirmoy Roy, 1979). Historical evidences show that the territory of Manipur was much bigger than that of the present (R.B. Pemberton, 2005:21;James Johnstone, 1974, :81;W. McCulloch, 1980 :1 &E.W. Dune, 1981: 1-2.). It is quite clear that “*Manipur was extending to the north up to Potkoi Pass to the South as far as the Manipur Government could extend its influence and to the East up to, at least, the Chindwin river. As for the west it was extending up to the Gwai (Borak) or Jiri River or Ahorang hill (Phulator) and it is certain that Manipur government extended its influence up to Chandrapur, at Sylhet border as it clear from the 1st (First) clause of the treaty of 1833 which runs*” as—“*The Raja will.....remove his Thana from Chandrapur, and establish it on the eastern bank of the Jeeree*” (Lairenmayum Iboonghal Singh, 1987:3).

LITERATURE REVIEW:

No serious research based study on *Salais* union and Meitei formation has yet been made by any scholar by utilizing all the available sources. In fact, some scholars have been brought to light on the subject matter in their respective works. However, still await thorough investigation and treatment within a wide canvas.

METHODOLOGY:

The methodology of the study is historical one, based on primary and secondary sources. The collected data -both primary and secondary have been analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Comparative study is also made whenever it is necessary to bring an accurate picture of the subject.

Base on *Sating Sakok*, it is narrated that near Nungoibi between Taipongthong and Nungoibi there was a stone with supernatural power known as Mani, a precious gem stone, on account of it the place is known as Manipur (W.I. Singh, 1986:411). Manipur, literally means the land of gems, was known by different names in ancient times. In the *Hayi Chak*, the traditional age, in the first millennium, she was known as *Tilikokton Ahanba*(N. Khelchandra Singh, 1969 :2), *Mira Pokthoklam* was also used to call in the age of *Haya Chak*(N. Khelchandra Singh, 1969 :2) in 2nd millennium, *Hana Semba Kona Loiba*(N. Khelchandra Singh, 1969 :2) in the age of *Khunung Langba Chak* in 3rd millennium and in the age of *Konna Chak* in 4th millennium she was known as

Muwa Polli (N. Khelchandra Singh, 1969 :2). *Kangleipak*, *Poireipak* and *Meitrabak* are also her indigenous names (Gangmumei Kabui, 1991:1). The name Manipur was not known to the people of Manipur up to the end of 17th century and it was coined only in the early part of eighteenth century during the reign of King Garib Niwaza (1709-48) (O.Bhogeswar Singh, 1973:50) after the conversion into Hinduism.

The origin of the Meitei, the major ethnic group of Manipur, is still in obscurity as varied theories, propositions; views and opinion have been postulated and propounded by many scholars and the study on the subject is greatly influenced by the religious faiths and political ideologies of the Meitei themselves, thus making the problem highly speculative and controversial (Gangmumei Kabui, 1991:15). The ethnic name Meitei was a combined appellation of Siamese ‘Tai’ and Kochin Chinese ‘Moy’ (Moy Tai= Moytai=Moitai=Meitei) and that the Meitei belong to the Moi section of the great Tai race (T.C. Hodson, 1975:10.). According to T.C. Hodson, “*it was derived from the blending of two words, Mei = man or people and Tei = Separate; Meitei = Separate people*” (T.C. Hodson, 1975:10). G.A. Grierson has placed the language of the Meitei in the Kuki-Chin sub family, a branch of Tibeto-Burman language(G.A. Grierson,1967:15) and also urged that the Tibeto-Burman and other Mongoloid groups inhabited the upper courses of Yang-tze-Kiang and Hoang-Ho rivers in China in Pre-historical times(G.A. Grierson,1967:15). He further stated that the ancestors of the Meitei were among their kinsmen who migrated from China to the upper waters of the Irrawaddy and Chindwin rivers of upper Burma and lived in the Hukwang valley, the present land of the Kachins before they proceed into Manipur valley. The Meitei and Kachin connection have been proved by the linguistic affinity (G.A. Grierson, 1967:6). Ch. Budhi is of the view that the archaeological and historical evidences point to the relationship of the ancient Meitei with the Mon-Khmer and Tai people but not of Mon Khmer Tai origin of the people. And the Meitei were the integration of two groups – ‘Mei’ people from one part of China and ‘Ti’ a barbarian from the North West China (Ch. Budhi, 1984:27-33). Lairenmayum Iboongohal Singh opines that “*The original inhabitants of Manipur were the Kiratas*” (Lairenmayum Iboongohal Singh, 1987:10). The Aryan origin of Meitei was most enthusiastically propounded and vehemently rejected by the protagonists and their opponents (Ch. Manihar Singh, 1984:9-25). But James Johnstone asserts that the people of Manipur were the descendents of Indo-Chinese stock with some admixture of Aryan blood (James Johnstone, 1974, :97ff). However, this view is discarded by Pemberton who claimed that the Meitei are the descendents of Tartars from China (R.B. Pemberton, 2005:37f). Dr. N. Pramodini Devi stated that there was no evidence of Tartar colonisation of Meitei, if they came; they were probably absorbed into the Meitei fold (Dr. N. Pramodini Devi, 2011:14). According to W. McCulloch the major tribe and clans of the Meitei appeared to have been the descendents of the Naga and the Kuki tribes (W. McCulloch, 1980:4). R. Brown also gives a view of tribal origin of the Meitei (R. Brown, 1874:28). T.C.Hodson summarised that “*Two hundred year*

ago, in the internal organisation in village, in habits and manners, the Meitei were as the hill people now are. The successive courses of the foreign invasions - Shan Burmese, English and Hindu, each left permanent marks on the civilization of the people so that they have passed finally away from the stage of relatively primitive culture with one of comparative civilization but their ultimate homogeneity with the Nagas and Kukis of the hill is undoubted”(T.C. Hodson, 1975:11). Though the immediate descent of the Meitei from the hill tribes as formulated or described by T.C. Hodson is not free from doubt but one cannot refuse the Naga and Kuki-Chin tribe’s elements in the evolution of the Meitei as an ethnic group (Gangmumei Kabui, 1991:19).

A large number of ethnic groups namely Tibeto-Burman of Mongoloid race, Austroloids (Monkhmer Austric), Tai Siamese Shan, Aryans etc. came to Manipur in successive waves of migration and dispersed in different direction which led to the cultural and physical absorption of numbers of ethnic groups to the so-called Meitei. Victor Purcell opined that there was a cultural affinity and this affinity brought the cultural unity of South-East Asian people (Victor Purcell, 1965:3). J. Roy asserted that at different periods the Nagas, Kukis, Shans, Chinese came and absorbed into local peoples and there are some Aryan and Dravidian features (Jyotirmoy Roy, 1979:4). We have numbers of evidences or data to formulate the idea that the blood of migrating groups infused with that of the Meitei whose ethnogenic history or origin was associated with South-East Asian regions and China, on the work of anthropology, sociology, ethno history, linguistics, geography, history, folk literature, myths and archaeology(Dr. N. Pramodini Devi, 2011:22). S.K.Chatterjee argued that the Kiratas were the ancestors of the present Bodo-Kachari, the Naga, the Kuki and the Meitei (S.K. Chatterjee, 1950:36) .

Many ethnic groups and tribes other than seven clans chiefdoms that constituted Meitei confederacy, were existed in Manipur. They accepted political supremacy of *Ningthouja* but retained their status of distinct clans (*Salais*) within the greater Meitei societal fold. The term Meitei was used during the period of the establishment of the *Ningthouja* dynasty by Pakhangba, the first historical king of Manipur, who ascended the throne at Kangla, the ancient seat of power in Manipur in 33AD to mean this clan or dynasty and the ethnic and social groups who were politically and socially integrated within the suzerainty of the *Ningthouja*. Historical evidences clearly indicate the existence of various ethnic groups and lineages in the valley of Manipur namely- the *Angom*, *Luwang*, *Mangang* (*Ningthouja*), *Khaba*, *Nganba*, *Sarangthem*, *Leisangthem*, *Chenglei*, *Haorok Konthou*, *Mating Mara*, *Lela/Lera Khongnang*, *Lokkha-Haokha*, *Chakpas*, *Khem*, *Heirem Khunjan*, *Moirang*, *Thanga-Kambong*, *Urok Usai*, *Lokkha-Lokkhu* (Gangmumei Kabui, 1991:69-85) of Tibeto-Burman, Tai and other Mongoloid origin who were brought gradually under the political suzerainty of leading clans.

Salai of the Meitei means clan or lineage. A *Salai* of the Meitei was originally an ethnic group or tribe, speaking a distinct language or dialect occupying a territory, having an autonomous principality under a ruler who was both a political chieftain and social head of the clan (Gangmumei Kabui, 1991:69-85). T.C. Hodson interpreted *Salai* as tribe (T.C. Hodson, 1975:73). The ethnic term “Meitei” meant only one of the *Salais* of the Meitei (Mangsidam Jitendra Singh, 1988:17). The term Meitei came into existence in the process of cultural and political absorption of numerous *Salais* into the Ningthouja power which came to be known as Meitei. The tribe Meitei in all probability, meant the *Ningthouja Salai* (clan) (Mangsidam Jitendra Singh, 1988:18). There had been existed nine *Salais*. They were- (i) *Ningthouja*, (ii) *Angom*, (iii) *Luwang*, (iv) *Khuman*, (v) *Moirang*, (vi) *Khaba*, (vii) *Nganba*, (viii) *Sarang-Leishangthem* and (ix) *Chenglei* (Loitongbam Kalachand Singh, 1965:143). Later on *Khaba* and *Nganba* grouped together and formed one *Salai* called *Khaba-Nganba*. And the last two groups i.e *Sarang-Leishangthem* and *Chenglei* grouped together to formed one *Salai* known as *Sarang-Leishangthem-Chenglei*. In the 1st (first) century AD, the seven *Salais*- (i) *Ningthouja* (ii) *Angom* (iii) *Luwang* (iv) *Khuman* (v) *Moirang* (vi) *Khaba-Nganba* and (vii) *Sarang-Leishangthem* (*Chenglei*) were found permanently settled in the valley of Manipur with their own territories. *Thiren Meiram Leeba* made a reference indirectly to the territorial directions in which different *Salais* were inhabited as-the direction of east (*Liklam*) was for *Angom*, north (*Awang*) for *Luwang*, *Laiji*? for *Khaba-Nganba*, south west (*Sanathong*) for *Moirang*, *Phenji* for *Sarang-Leishangthem* (*Chenglei*), south (*Kha*) for *Khuman* and *Nonglum* (*Okshang*) for *Ningthouja* (N. Ibochouba 1982:30-31). L. Kulachandra says that the western portion of Kangla, the western side of Imphal river, the heart of Imphal was occupied by the *Mangang* (later known as *Ningthouja*), *Lamphal Pat* by the *Luwang*, the area of *Pumlen Pat* (lake) by the *Khuman*, the areas near *Kongba* river by the *Angom*, *Loikhongpung* (*Moirang*, the capital of *Moirang Salai*) by the *Moirang*, *Takna-Kha* by the *Khaba-Nganba* and *Laishang Hiden* (*Thoubal Leishangkhang*) by the *Chenglei* (*Sarang-Leishangthem*) (L.Kulachandra, 1972:46).

The genealogies of the *Angom* and *Ningthouja* indicated that Puleiromba, the son of Kuptreng was the founder of *Angom Salai*. Puleiromba, the chief of *Angom* played a significant role in making Nongda Lairen Pakhangba as king. During the coronation of king Pakhangba higher ritual status was given to Puleiromba as he was coroneted as the *Angom* chief before the coronation of Pakhangba. Later on the *Angom* chief accepted the tributary status and *Angou Paba* title was given by the *Ningthouja* kings. Gangmumei Kabui writes, “*Angom chiefs were given residence by the Meitei Kings to the north of Kangla but driven out to Kontha in the north east Imphal river or Turel Achouba. The Angom extended their support to Pakhangba to become the ruler of Kangla*” (Gangmumei Kabui, 1991:73). On the alliance of *Ningthouja-Luwang* and *Angom Salais*, the *Ningthouja- Meitei* state was founded but the *Angom- Ningthouja* political and social alliance could not last long as the *Ningthoujas* tried to

control directly over the *Angom*. The *Angom* already reduced to the status of tributary; however they tried to maintain their separate identity. Later, the *Angom* constituted one of the *Salais* of the Meitei(W.I. Singh, 1986:340).

Luwang Salai was founded by Poireiton,(R.K. Hiranya, 1985)the popular folk hero of *Poireiton Khun-thokpa*. Poireiton was clan chiefs, political chief and social head (*Piba*) of the *Luwang*. *Luwanglon* supplied the information as -“*Heiphurel gave birth to Pongthang, Pongthan who was succeeded by Nongdalem Akhuba, then Kurumel, Meinaiba, Kurumlel Heinaidaba whose son was Ningthou Heironglel Longjumba who appeared to be the chief of the Luwang*”(R.K. Hiranya, 1985) who gave birth three children, two sons and one daughter—Ningthou Heirong Ngangthon, Poireiton and a daughter Laisna (?).Their first settlement was at Kekrupan, then in Langkon hills which mentioned in *Mahou Naophamlon*(R.K. Hiranya, 1985). According to *Langten Khuya*, the region of the *Luwang* covered from *Liklai Leima Chingjin* to *Hou Thangwai*. Traditionally *Hou Thangwai* comprised *Lamdeng, Kameng, Mayang Langjing, Terak, Urak, Chirang Luwangsangbam, Khonghampat Chingjin, Sekmai, Khoiri Khul* and *Lamphel* of Imphal west (R.K. Hiranya, 1985).According to *Luwang Lon*, the first ruler of the Luwangs was not Poireiton but Khunthiba(R.K. Hiranya, 1985 & W.I. Singh, 1986:106). In the opinion of W.I. Singh, Poireiton was not only the chief of *Luwang* but also the first king of Poirei (Meitei)(W.I. Singh, 1986:106) founding a dynasty of *Chekkkan*. However, other sources do not record Poireiton as the king of Poirei or as of the Luwang clan.

The *Khuman* genealogy supplied the list of ancestors who were the joint forefathers of the *Luwang* and *Khumans* as -Nongdamlel Akhuba, Nongdamlen Ahanba, Kurumlel Menaiba, Heironglen Longjumba, Ningthou (Chief) Heironglen Thonganglen who had two sons- Thouwaren and Poireiton. Tabung Singmaiba or Shingtabung, the son of Poireiton had two sons-Arong and Paming(Gangmumei Kabui,1991:158). The *Khumans* were the descendants of Arong whereas the *Luwang* of Paming. Thoubal was made the capital of *Khumans* who were inhabited earlier in the eastern part of Imphal valley and shifted their capital to *Khuman-Mei-Koipung* near *Mayang Imphal* afterwards. They started absorbing with different tribes namely *Kharoi, Hangoi, Nongyai, Heirem, Khunjas* etc. And these tribes became sub-lineages within the *Khuman* social fold and converted to *Khuman Salai*(Gangmumei Kabui, 1991:73 & W.I. Singh, 1986:158-59). A time came for the decline of the *Khuman* as a result of aggrandizement of the *Ningthouja* and the *Khuman* lost their political entity but continued to be a social group known as *Khuman Salai*.

Moirang, a little cradle land of human civilization on the bank of Loktak lake, the greatest fresh water lake in North-East India, is the name of ancient regional principality peopled by a group of people with the same name

Moirang. Gangmumei Kabui says, the geographical position of *Moirang* which covered the Khuga river basin and the hill route to the west attracted various ethnic communities from South Asia and upper Burma and beyond and had natural multicity of ethnic tribes/groups amongst its population of this region (Gangmumei Kabui, 1991:167). The legendary accounts of the origins of *Moirang* is -Supreme God Kasa Ningthou created the Universe, the Solar system, Sun, Earth, Moon, Fire, Water and Wind and gods including a divine known as *Moirang*. He created seven goddesses and a god called *Nganba*. He went down from *Thangjing* mountain and out of his union with goddess *Leimarel Khongjang Leimahanbi* a child was born whose name was *Ngangoi*, the earliest name of *Moirang*(M. Nodiachand, 1985). Another legend furnished that the Supreme god and goddess *Leimarel* representing the sky and the earth gave birth to *Ngangoi*. According to *Thangjing Khunthoklon* and *Thiren Liba*, the act of the sky and the earth was known as *Keke* which was corrupted to *Kege*, one of the earliest names of *Moirang*(M. Nodiachand, 1985). It is advocated that Supreme god created seven goddesses and *Nganba*, a male god who established the settlement(M. Nodiachand, 1985), and proceeded to *Keke Thangjing* hills, *Sareng* hills, *Chingsang-me* range and settled at *Nangkha*(O.K. Singh, 1983). But the legendary origin of *Moirang* is rejected by some scholars who argued that *Ngangoi*, *Kege* and *Moirang* were different ethnic and linguistic groups. The first reference of the *Kege* is found during King *Khongtekcha* (c1250-60AD) of *Ningthouja* dynasty. It is stated that the *Kege* made an attack to the *Meitei* but they were defeated and several were killed by *Tongak Lakpich*(O. Bhogeswar Singh ,1966:46), an able general of king *Khongtekcha*. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* described the tribe as *Moirangs* while the other text described as *Kege* who were formerly in occupation of the region which was soon after known as *Moirang*. *Keges* inhabited first at *Ethai* and then expanded to *Ngangkha Rawai*. The *Kege* was the name given by the *Meitei* to a group of *Moriya* principality of the *Kabaw* valley of upper Burma, who gradually moved to the southern *Imphal* valley. The *Keges* were also known as *Keke*. The *Keges* started mixing with other tribes of the valley and later they got amalgamated with the *Moirangs*(W.I. Singh, 1986:130-40). They were ethnically a mixed race(W.I. Singh, 1986:141-42). After the amalgamation of both the tribes, they came to be known as *Kege-Moirang*. Since the *Moirangs* and *Keges* amalgamated into a single unit, the *Moirang* dialect and culture are of *Kege-Moirang* i.e. mixed culture(W.I. Singh, 1986:208).

Another hypothesis for the origin of the appellation of *Moirang* is that *Moirang* area including the *Khuga* valley was called *Moiram* by the *Marems*, meaning Land of the sun before the appellation *Moirang* came into existence. The *Marems* lived on the *Loi-jing* range, from there they saw *Imphal* valley, they were charmed by the beauty of the emerald valley full of birds and named the valley *Langmei-hen Moiram* (*Moi-lam*) meaning ‘*Langmei-plenty-sun-land*’, literally it means “The land of the sun with plenty of *Langmeis* as in the *Marem* dialect ‘*Moi*’=Sun and ‘*ram*’ =Land i.e. land of sun and *Langmei*’ is a kind of beautiful bird. The *Ngangois* of *Ngangkha*, the modern

Ngangkhatara-rawai in Bishnupur district of Manipur, had social contact with the Marem who were inhabited on the western southern hills before becoming *Moirang* tribe. When the new immigrant settled in *Moiram*, the *Nangois* called them *Moirang* by suffixing the word 'rang' as in *hei-rang*, *lei-rang*, *pi-rang* etc(W.I. Singh,1986:208-9-423). *Moirangs* were not a homogeneous tribe but heterogeneous tribes of *Ma*, *Hui*, *Lai* and *Khu*(W.I. Singh,1986:209).*Moirang* territory included Ningthoukhong, Loktak lake Thanga Islets, sometimes Lammangdong and Khuman Yangba in north, Manipur River, Pumlun Lake, Mondum and Lokkha-Haokha in the east, and in the west Matarok stream and its surrounding hills and Khuga river basin(M. Nodiachand, 1985).

The history of the *Khabas* and *Nganbas* is known very little. In fact, they were different ethnic communities who had settled in Manipur in early days. Before the occupation of the throne of Kangla by Pakhangba, the *Khabas* were very powerful politically and once Kangla was brought under their control. The geographical jurisdiction of the *Khaba* was the area which bounded by Langol hills in the west, in the north Khonghampat, in the east Langmaiching and in the south Lamdaibung. In the early part, before the coronation of Pakhangba, the *Khaba* always challenged Pakhangba's power and did not accept the supremacy of Pakhangba, which resulted a series of fight for the throne of Kangla. In the struggle between the *Khabas* and Pakhangba, the *Khabas* defeated the latter, i.e. their contestant. Pakhangba fled and took refuge among the *Moirang* for many years (N. Khulchandra Singh, June 5, 1983). Pakhangba got support from *Moirang* prince Chaoba Shaubol Ngamba and with the *Moirang* forces Pakhangba swooped down upon the *Khabas* who resisted the invasion. In course of fighting many of the *Khabas* lost their lives including *Khaba Nongjengba* and buried together (B. Kullachandra Sharma, 1985:17). Those who survived moved from one place to another for seeking shelter to save their life. Some fled to hills and became *Tangkhol*, some became *Kabuis* of *Nungang* village in the western hills, some lived among the *Mahou* tribe who were in the south and some became *Khaba Umlen* by settling at *Koubru* foothills(Gangmumei Kabui, 1991:83). *Khaba Tangalba*, a scholar of *Khaba* submitted to Pakhangba and some *Khabas* were saved by *Puleiromba*, the *Angom* chief. The defeat of the *Khabas* in the hand of Pakhangba struck a severe blow to their political power and their repeated attempt to regain the throne of Kangla also could not be fruitful. The *Nganbas* were also found scatter in different places. In course of historical process the *Khabas* and *Nganbas* grouped together as *Kha-Ngangba* and became a social group of the *Meitei*. B. Kullachandra Sharma says that the *Khabas* were in all probability the descendents of the migrating group known as *Austronesian*, who came to *Imphal* valley in the early period of *Christian* era(B. Kullachandra Sharma, 1985:17).

The *Chingleis*, *Srangthem* and *Leisangthem* were supposed to be very old ethnic group who were later on integrated into one *Salai* called *Sarang-Leisangthem*(*Chengleis*)(Gangmumei Kabui, 1991:74). N. Manaoyaima speaks about the association of the *Chenglei* with the *Khaba-Nganba*(N. Manaoyaima, 1979:11). Most probably

the *Chengleis* came under the supremacy of the *Khaba* prior to their inclusion to the *Sarang-Leishangthem* (Dr. N. Pramodini Devi, 2011:78). They dwelt on the bank of Nambul river and the *Chenglei*, *Sarang* and *Leisangthem* occupied some part of Manipur since early period before the establishment of *Ningthouja* and remained as an independent group until their political and cultural absorption to the Meitei later than 6th century AD. The *Chengleis* being an autonomous or independent ethnic group, who had sovereign status, stayed on as powerful till the reign of *Chinglen Naral Pangganba* of 6th century A.D (Dr. N. Pramodini Devi, 2011:78).

Ningthouja Salai was brought into being by Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (33-154 AD), the first historical king of Manipur in the 1st century A.D. whose capital was at Kangla, the territory covered the area of Imphal. He was a man of mysterious origin. *Ningthouja* genealogy projected Sentreng as the father of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba. However, W.I.Singh regarded Likleng who was holding the post of Tupu to be the father of Pakhangba (O. Bhogeswar Singh, 1966:2 & W.I. Singh, 1986:269). The *Mangang*, the earliest ethnic group who ruled at Kangla and its surroundings, formed the core of the *Ningthouja* kingdom of the later period (Gangmumei Kabui, 1991:73). They were overwhelmed and a good number of the *Mangangs* were absorbed to the *Ningthouja* (Poirei or Meitei). The term *Ningthouja* was applied to the *Mangang* in later period (W.I. Singh, 1986:329). After the completion of subjugation and absorption of the numerous *Salais* and small ethnic groups, the *Ningthouja* power came to be known as Meitei and unified powerful Meitei kingdom had emerged. W.McCulloch says, the Meitei tribe in all probability meant the *Ningthouja* (W. McCulloch, 1980 :4) which confirmed by many scholars also.

The seven powerful *Salais* (tribes) absorbed the other tribes -*Haokha-Lokha* into *Mangang* or *Ningthouja*, *Lera-Khongnang* and *Nigol-Laiton* into *Angom*, *Haorok-Konthou* into *Chenglei*, *Thanga-Kambong* and *Urok-Ushai* into *Nganba* and *Heiremkhunjam* into *Luwang* (Mangsidam Jitendra Singh, 1988:18). On the origin of the Meitei *Salais* we have different versions in the various Meitei literatures. However, that cannot be accepted as historical but used as sources of history. It is mentioned in *Thiren Meiram Leeba that Angom, Ningthouja, Luwang, Khuman, Sarang-Leishangthem, Khaba-Nganba* and *Moirang* were born from right eye, left eye, right ear, left ear, right nostril, left nostril and teeth respectively of the Taibangpanba Mapu (Creator) (N. Ibochouba 1982:30-31). T.C.Hodson informed as -the *Ningthouja* was born for left eyes, the *Angom* from right eye, the *Chenglei* from right ear, the *Kha-Nganba* from left ear, the *Luwang* from right nostril, the *Khuman* from left nostril and the *Moirang* from the teeth of the Creator (T.C. Hodson, 1975:100). Each *Salai* has different colours of its own as -red for *Ningthouja*, white for *Angom*, sky blue for *Luwang*, and black for *Khuman*, strips of black and white (multi colour) for *Moirang*, green for *Khaba-Nganba* and blue for *Sarang-Leisangthem*.

A reference is made to the existence of heptarchy during the reign of Pakhangba(Singh, R.K. Jhalajit,1992:23). The credit for the unification of different ethnic groups, tribes and/or seven Salais under the Meitei Social confederacy, so called the Meitei went to Pakhangba, the head of Meitei confederacy. After destroying the power of the *Khabas* and *Poireiton*, Pakhangba occupied the throne of Kangla on the invitation of the *Mangang*, *Angom* and *Luwang* which was a signal for making the federation of the Meitei. The power of the *Khabas* and *Nganbas* were crushed down and only the *Khuman* and *Moirang* remained independent without joining to the Meitei confederacy. They stood as stumbling block in the way of the establishment of Meitei Nation-State. Although, the *Khumans* and *Moirang* could not stand against the power of *Ningthoujas* in future course of action. As their autonomy could not be maintained and could not survive for long time, they ultimately absorbed into the Meitei. The tribes who were inhabited in various parts of Manipur valley came into contact, and after a struggle for supremacy amalgamated (Mangsidam Jitendra Singh, 1988:21). McCulloch remarks, “*For a time, the Koomul (Khuman) appears to have been the most powerful, and after its declension, the Moirang tribe. But by degree the Meithei (Meitei) subdued the whole, and the name Meithei (Meitei) has become applicable to all*” (W. McCulloch, 1980 :4). What the Meitheis (Meitei) meant by McCulloch is *Ningthouja*. For a century the name Meitei was applied only to the people of *Ningthouja Salai* but after the struggle for political supremacy among the seven *Salais* or principalities in which the *Ningthoujas* emerged successful and the term Meitei began to apply to all the seven *Salais* in the Valley (Mangsidam Jitendra Singh, 1988:21). The emergence of the Meitei state or nation state was the result of the military aggrandizement and boundary expansion- the prolong struggle for about one thousand five hundred years among the various ethnic groups and the *Salais* as well as intrusion and absorption in successive period. Through a long process from the 1st century A.D to 15th century the Meitei came into existence as an organised state during the reign of king Kyamba (1467-1508) with the internationally recognition of its sovereign status by Shan king of upper Burma side by side with the mutual demarcation of the boundaries(A. Lokendra Singh, 1986:3). The recognition of the internationally entity of the Meitei state (kingdom) by powerful king of upper Burma in 15th century proved the power and strength of Meitei union. As a result of the fusion of Indo-Aryan and Mongoloid peoples, the nucleus of the Manipuri (Meiteilon)—speaking people of today was formed and this nucleus is believed to have formed in the first centuries of the Christian era (R.K. Jhalajit Singh, 1992:20). The Meitei language marked the symbol of the Meitei nationality and on the basis of its unilingual character the Meitei kingdom stood a nation state (Gangmumei Kamei, 2010:20).

No doubt, the Meitei culture is a commingling of the cultural elements of the various *Salais* and ethnic groups that had been infused, absorbed or amalgamated to the Meitei. The union of *Salais* and other to be of the Meitei become so solid now that it become impossible to break it by any power. Of course, the political entity of the

Salais had ceased to exist and remained extinct with the formation of the Meitei (greater Meitei) since long time back however, the identity of the *Salais* is inextinguishable which is noticeable mainly from the Meitei marriage system and ancestor worship (*Apokpa Kurumba*). It is the custom of the Meitei that marriage should not take place within the same ‘*Yek*’ (clan) or same *Sagei* (clan) as it is a social exogamous group within which marriage is not authorized. *Yek* and *Salai* are used almost in the same sense. The *Yek-Salai* is within the degree of prohibited relation (Gangmumei Kamei, 2010:87). Hence, no matrimonial relation can be made between the members of the same *Salai*. It signifies that *Salai* identity become too distinct at the time of marriage. The *Yek* structure and its rules i.e. Meitei marriage rule played multi-role in strengthening and unifying Meitei power also. The worship of *Apokpa* (ancestor), the founder of the *Salai* or tribe is the most indispensable part of traditional religion of the Meitei. It is known as *Apokpa Khurumba* (ancestor-worship) in which the progenitors of the seven *Salais* (clans) are propitiated once in a year by the descendents of the concerned *Salais*. The whole ritual involving to the ancestors is the symbolic representation of the kinship of the *Salais*. The rites established and reinforced the idea of social roles and identities which contributed to the psychological well-being and social harmony of the *Salais* (Mangsidam Jitendra Singh, 1988:81). In the *Apokpa Khurumba* of a particular *Salai*, no persons of other *Salais* and outsiders are authorized to join except the members of that particular *Salai*. The food cooked and articles associated with the ancestor worship (*Apokpa Khurumba*) of a *Salai* are consumed and utilized by the members of the concerned *Salai* only. Even the left out food items and things etc. are also buried in a hole, not to have or not to use by any others—birds, animals etc. The ancestor worship of the different *Salais* are conducted once in a year on a specific day of the concerned *Salai*; to enable to meet all the members of the particular *Salai* or sub-clan once in a year in the name of the deity (ancestor) and induced them to think for a instant that they are all the lineages of the same progenitor, which brought love and co-operation, mutual aid etc within a *Salai*. The worship of ancestor re-united the members of a *Salai* under the banner of a common origin and made them to have a sense for the preservation and safeguarding of the *Salai*’s identity-*Salai* over and above social identity.

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