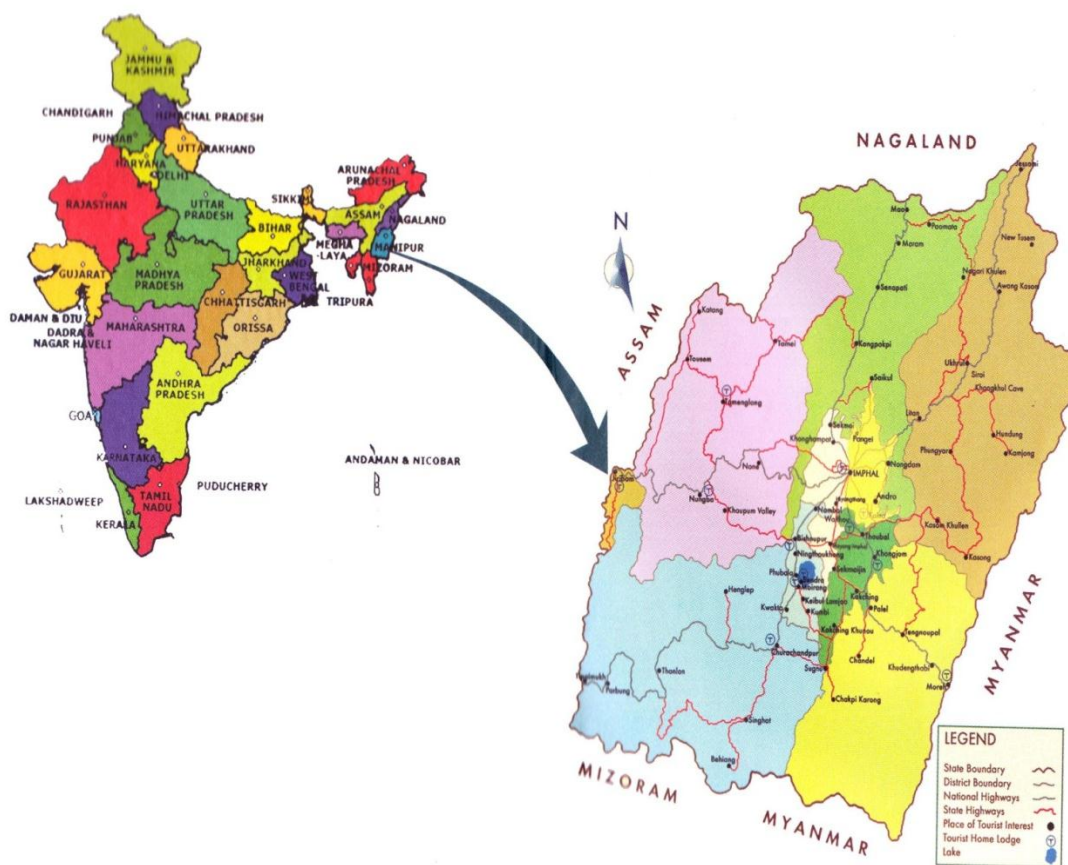


## MAP LOCATING MANIPUR

(NOT TO SCALE)



## Chapter: 3

### **Environment, Archaeological and Historical Setting**

The state of Manipur is situated in the eastern border of the northeastern corner of the Indian subcontinent. Manipur lies between 23° 50' and 25° 41' N, and 93° 59' and 94° 45' E., with its capital as Imphal. It is bounded by three Indian states and one country; i.e. Nagaland in the north, Assam in the west, Mizoram in the south, and Burma in the east (Cover page). Manipur covers an area of 22,347 sq. km. with a population of 27,21,756, Male: 13,69,764; Female: 13,51,992 with 79.85% literary rate (Census 2011). Manipur is a state where several ethnic groups reside. "Thus ethnologically and linguistically, the *Meiteis* (locals of Manipur) are Tibeto-Burman of the southern Mongoloid with Austroloid, Aryan, and Tai admixtures (including some Negrito and Dravidians elements?). Sociologically, the *Meiteis* have absorbed these foreign elements and completely integrated them in their social structure" (Kabui, 2011:21).

Various regions of Manipur have been ruled by several clans at some point of time but the central plain has been the seat of the *Ninthoujas*, which emerged as the most powerful clan in the history of Manipur. Many scholars agreed that Manipur had an independent long reign of the *Ninthouja* clan, starting from Lord Nong-da-Lairel Pakhangba (A.D. 33) till King Kulachandra (A.D.1890). Manipur came under the British sway on 12<sup>th</sup> April, 1891 after the defeat in the Khongjom War. It later came to be recognized as the twentieth state of the Indian Union on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1972. Manipur has nine Districts: Tamenglong, Churachanpur, Bishnupur, Thoubal, Imphal West, Imphal East, Ukhrul, Chandel.

#### **3.1. Geological Formation (Fig.3)**

Geologically, the state of Manipur is a result of series of geologic and geodynamical behaviors, folding of sedimentary strata in the great Alpine- Himalayan Geosyncline called Tethys, which was formed during the Tertiary Era. The rocks in Manipur comprise both older types from the Cretaceous to the recent alluvium type of the Holocene.

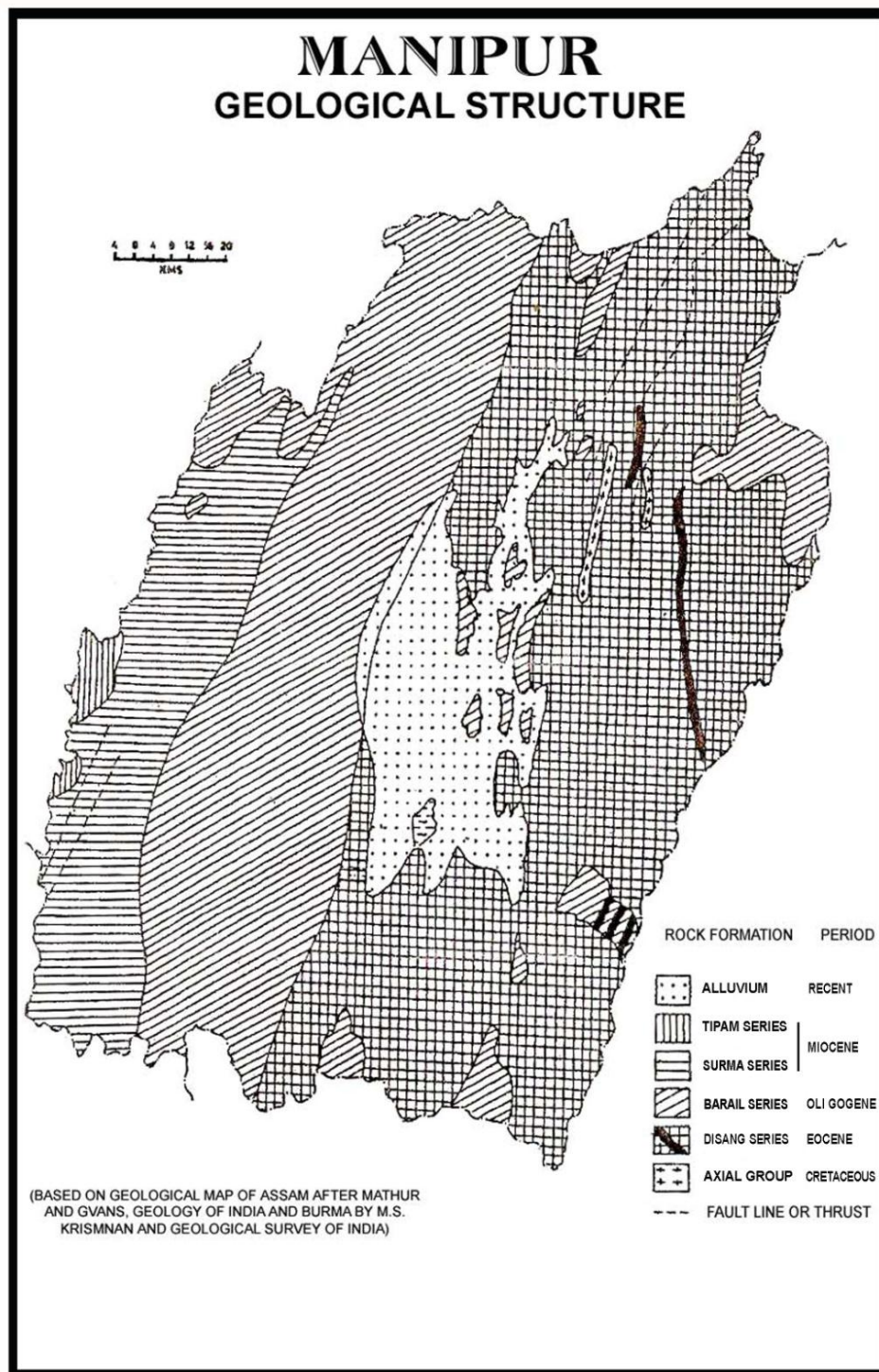


Fig. 3. Geological Map of Manipur

The oldest rock is found along the entire Indo- Myanmar Mountain Arc. This was formed in the Cretaceous Period around 80-90 Million Year Ago (MYA). This is known as the Ukhrul limestone. The limestone occurs as lenses in grit sandstone and buff coloured shale. Disang Series is a geosynclinal lithological formation deposited during the Middle and Lower Eocene periods around 40-60 MYA. The Disangs towards the west consists of splintery dark grey shales intercalated with minor mudstone, silt and sandstones and in the east, its main constituents are sandstone, buff coloured shales siliceous limestone, grit and conglomerate. The Barails overlies the Disang series. This mainly occurs in the western region. It is believed to have been formed during upper Eocene to Upper Oligocene about 25-45 MYA. The Surma series were formed during the lower Miocene period, around 18-25 MYA. It consists of sandstone, sandy shales, mudstones and thin conglomerates. This covers considerable parts of the Barak Basin. The Tipam series deposited during the upper and middle Miocene Period and consisted of ferruginous sandstone interbedded with shale, sandy shale, clay and conglomerate. The Imphal Alluvium is the youngest landform deposited during the Holocene. The alluvium has a thickness of about 200-300 metres, overlying the Disang shales. The alluvium consists of clay, sand, sandy clay and silt which are the best raw materials for pottery making, thus many pottery manufacturing sites are suited in and around the alluvium valley.

### 3.1.1 Relief

The relief features of Manipur based on the structure, topography and geomorphologic process is primarily divided into;

- a. Manipur Hills
- b. Imphal Plain

The Manipur Hills covering about 92% of the total area and with only 8% of the population consists of series of parallel ranges of the Himalayas which is broadly divided into;

The Eastern Hills: this mountain chain spread in a compact and continuous chain about 200 km. in length and 20 to 50 km. in breadth over the frontier zone between India and Myanmar. The average height of this mountain chain is about 1500 metres above the

MSL and the highest point is in the north-east Ukhrul. Khayangbung, Siroi and Kachoobung are the important peaks of the Eastern Hills. The rocks of this mountain chain are mainly of the Disang series. These rocks contain minerals like nickel, copper, chromite, limestone, etc.

The Western Hills: this mountain chain is about 180km. in length and about 50 km. wide in north and 70 km. in south. And in the north and north-west many peaks rises above 2500m above the MSL some important peaks are Tenipu (Iso), Laikpat, Tampaba, Koubu. In these parallel ranges many important rivers like Barak, Irang, Makru and Jiri spurs out towards the Plain. The rocks of this mountain chain are mainly composed of the Barail series but the eastern slopes are of the Surma series.

The Imphal alluvial Plain is the most interesting geological formation, the plain is surrounded by the Eastern and the Western mountain chains in all the sides. This covers an area of 1,843 sq. km which means that it forms 8.2 % of the total area of Manipur. It is a flat oval shaped alluvial plain measuring about 60 km. from north to south and 30 km. from east to west. The altitude of the plain varies from 838m in the north and 792 m in the south, as the southern region lays lower than northern region, many rivers flow to the south forming the Loktak Lake, the largest lake in the North-east India. This alluvial plain is densely populated with 70% of the total population of Manipur.

### 3.1.2 Drainage Pattern

Manipur is well flourished with three major river systems:

- a. The Barak River System
- b. The Manipur or Imphal River System, locally known as Turel Achouba.
- c. The Chindwin or Ningthee River System

The Barak River basin is the second largest river basin of North-Eastern India and the biggest river in Manipur. It covers a total basin area of about 78,000 km<sup>2</sup> of which Manipur alone occupies 10% .The Barak basin forms 40% area of the Manipur state. Its source is 16 km. east of Mao Police Station of Senapati District and it is known as ‘Sanglook’ at its source. The main tributaries of this river system are Jiri, Makru and Irang.

The Manipur River system comprises of Imphal, Iril, Thoubal and Nambul rivers which originates from the hills located in the north, north-west and north-east, respectively in the Kangpokpi area. These rivers flow in the alluvium plain region of the state. This is the longest river in Manipur and joins the Chindwin or Ningthee River in Myanmar.

The Chindwin or Ningthee River is the largest river system of Myanmar though this river is small in Manipur. The Akonglok River and its tributaries; Chingai and Chamu which originates from the Ukrul hills in Manipur join the Chindwin.

### 3.1.3. Forest and soil type

The vegetation of the North-Eastern Region (NER) of India is broadly classified as:

1. Tropical
2. Sub-Tropical
3. Temperate
4. Sub-Alpine
5. Alpine Vegetation

These are further sub-divided, based on altitude and climatic conditions of the region. In Manipur the forest is sub-divided into:

- i. Tropical Moist Deciduous Forest
- ii. Tropical Moist Semi-Evergreen Forest
- iii. Sub Tropical or Dry Temperate Forest
- iv. Sub-Tropical Pine Forest

These forests are classified as Reserved forests, Protected forests and Unclassed forests for administrative purpose.

The soil types found in Manipur are products of the Disang, Barail and Tipam series of the Tertiary Period. There are two major soil types; residual and transported soils. The soils of the Manipur hill regions are of residual type and the Central Plain is mainly of the transported soils type which is brought down by the rivers.

These soils are further sub divided into;

- i. Non laterised Red soil: this type of soil is found in the regions of the Eastern and the Western Hills of Manipur. It is generally yellowish red to reddish brown in colour with high amount of phosphorus and potassium; in texture they are loamy and granular.
- ii. Laterised Red Soil: this is found along the Barak basin and on the western slope of the Western Manipur hills. It is red in colour and contain high amount of phosphorous and nitrogen and potassium in small amount.
- iii. Alluvial soil: this is found in the Manipur valley which is derived from the Manipur river and its tributaries. It is grey to pale brown in colour and is clayey loam with high amount of potassium and phosphorous with moderate amount of nitrogen.

### **3.2. Archaeological background of Manipur**

Archaeology is a scientific disciplinary which elucidate right from the appearance, existence, persistence, advance (noteworthy or illustrious episode, for which it is marked), degeneracy and finally, disappearance (partly) of man and his interwoven culture, mainly in respect to the ecological, sociological, economical and political spheres. H.D Sankalia defined Archaeology as a pursuit of history of man.

It is well known that T.C Sharma of the Guwahati University has enormously contributed to the North-eastern Archaeology. Likewise, in Manipur eminent personnel arose to contribute in this field was W. Yumjao who was the first scholar to have reported archaeological finds in Manipur, as early as in the 1930s. His archaeological findings dotted Manipur under the Archaeological marking on the related map of the sub continent. Of course, the imperative input of Dr Okram Kumar Singh is equally worth mentioning. There are other individuals whose direct or indirect archaeological contributions added the value of archaeological finds in Manipur.

There are several literary references of Manipur in various literatures. In the *Adi Parva*, there is reference of Arjuna meeting Chitrāngadā during his exile in the north eastern area of the present Indic regions, who is referred as a daughter of the King of Manipura (Manipur). When Arjuna asked her hand in marriage, the King according to their matrilineal customs, conditioned that his daughter and her offspring will stay in

their motherland, Manipur. Accordingly, after their marriage, the Princess and her son Babruvahana or Babhruvahana became the heir to the throne of Manipur.

Another reference of Chitrāngadā, the princess of Manipura returning to her motherland is in the Mahaprasthanika Parva, which describes the travelling of the five Pandava brothers, along with their wife, Draupati and a dog accompanying them to the Himavat (Himalayas). “Utupi (Uloopi), the daughter of the Naga cheif, O thou of Kunti’s race entered the waters of Ganga. The princess Chitrangada set out for the capital of Manipura”. (Ganguli, 2002).

“Then, on the advice of the ChilaRai (Koches), messengers were sent to the king of Manipur demanding his submission. The messengers returned with the king of Manipur who performed obeisance and presented Narnarayan with 40 elephants, 1000 gold coins and 20,000 silver coins and agreed to pay an annual tribute of 10 elephants, 300 gold mohurs and 20,000 rupees” (Bahadur, 1933:295-296).

The history of the *Meities* (Manipuris) is chronicled in *Puyas* or *Puwaris* (stories about our forefathers), namely, the Ningthou Kangbalon, Cheitharol Kumbaba, Ningthourol Lambuba, Poireiton Khunthokpa, Panthoibi Khongkul, etc. in the archaic Meitei script. British officials like Colonel McCulloch and Dr R Brown referred to Manipuris as Munniporees in the 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

Generally, the Indian sub continent like other parts of the world exhibits the culture of mankind in the Quaternary Period as comprising of three broad divisions viz. Paleolithic Cultures (Lower, Middle and Upper), Mesolithic and Neolithic. This is a generalized broader divisions of cultures but regional influences on these cultures cannot be ruled out, which are the results of various obvious reasons such as ecological niches, topographical niches, etc. such various unique environmental niches forces mankind to out bit and adapt themselves, which then results in what we know as “Regional Variation/s” or ‘Regional Culture’ for example; the Perigordian, Chatleperonian, Gravettian, etc in Europe, the Natutian in West Asia, Choukotien in China, Hoabinhian in Vietnam, etc. Similar phenomenal has been noticed even in Manipur, mainly due to its geographical settings, its nearness to the Far East Asian countries, which is another factor to assimilate its cultures and typo-technology to eastern sphere and dissimilates from the western sphere. “The Stone Age Culture of this region can broadly be divided into two sections i.e. Pre-Neolithic and Neolithic.

Pre-Neolithic includes Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Hoabihian and Natutian” (Devi,2003:5).

### **3.2.1. Pre-historic Phase**

A trial excavation conducted by Dr. O.K.Singh in 1978 complimented the discovery of Paleolithic tools (including bone tools) from one of the three Khangkhui limestones caves located 11kms south east of Ukhrul town, Ukhrul District.

The Khangkhui limestone cave revealed a thickness of 1.523m. The lowest level of 45.7 m consists of pebble sandstone gravels with minor amount of shale. Dark brown soil of 23.3cm which according to O.K.Singh yield a chopper, South Asian type handaxe, spear heads, various scrapper, blade, burins, borers, flakes, points, knife, tabular flakes and large fluted core of sandstone. The stone tool industry is based on flake and blade tools and few core tools. Animal bones and teeth of herbivorous animals were among the finds. A layer of pale brown of 63.5cm thickness bears points, blade, burin, flake and small fluted cores, along with bone tools such as blade, scrapers and points. “The stone tool industry found in Manipur is closely comparable with that of Choukoutien culture of China” (Devi, 2003:7). A special typical Khangkhui cave tools are the blades with mid-ridges on both the surfaces and flakes with a beveled edges. Dr L.Kunjeswori Devi believes it to be a local development.

The unifacial stone tools collected from Machi village in Chandel District, Manipur is similar to those found at North Western India. Some Paleolithic stone tools of core and flake tool industry comprising of scrapers, borer cum hollow scrapers, knife, flake, blades and various cores were found during exploration conducted by the State Archaeology Department, Manipur at Sajik Tampak, Chandel District.

The State Archaeology, Govt. of Manipur carried out an exploration in 1979 and again in 1981 at Tharon village, Tamenglong District. The exploration here has exposed five pre historic caves and rock shelters yielding edge ground pebble tools. Megalithic monuments and rock engravings are amongst its discovery by the team. Here, five caves were discovered along a local stream, Kalemki Magu, near which edge ground pebble tools including flake tools and elliptical pebble with grinding

faces were collected. Typologically, the collected artifacts have close similarity with those of Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Vietnam.

Basically, so far as Archaeology of Manipur is concerned the following settlement areas of the Prehistoric culture are found at:

A) Paleolithic Age

1. The Songbu cave in Chandel District, Manipur.
2. The Khangkhui cave of Ukhrul District.
3. The Machi hilltop village in Chandel District.
4. The Nongpok Keithelmanbi Locality No. 1 & 2, Senapati District (Fig.4)

The lower Paleolithic people of Manipur appear to have settled mainly in cave but it is seen that during upper Paleolithic period hilltop man were occupied. Paleolithic stone tools consists of core and flake tool industry like flakes, blades, handaxes, axes, adzes, scrapers, borers, burins, scrapers, knives, etc.

B) Hoabinhian Age

1. The Taron cave, Tharon village, Tamenglong District.
2. The Nongpok Keithelmanbi Locality No.1, Senapati District (Fig.4).

The Hoabinhian man of Manipur also occupied caves and hilltops. The Hoabinhian was first defined by the First Congress of Pre historians of the Far East, Hanoi in 1932 since then the definition of Hoabinhian has changed, and it is now not taken as a culture but a typo-technology of stone tools which are found only in the eastern regions of East Asia. The Hoabinhian tools are characterized by edge grounding and are unifacial tools. The associates with this tool types are flake stone tools, few bone tools and artifacts, grinding stone and mortars and simple cord marked pottery in its later stage.

C) Neolithic Age

1. Nongpok Keithelmanbi, Senapati District.
2. Napachik low hill knoll, Wangoo, Bishnupur District.
3. Phunan Hilltop, Thoubal District.
4. Laimanai Hilltop, Thoubal District.

The Neolithic people seem to have roamed over several hills and dales of the present area of Manipur. The Neolithic stone tools are characterized by grinding, pecking, sawing and polishing techniques and the stone tool industry comprises of pebble and flake tools, ground celts, non geometric microliths like points, borers, burins, etc, other associates are tri pod legs, ring footed wares and spindle whorls.

### **3.2.2. Proto historic Phase**

During the Proto historic period of Manipur, the areas of settlement of the then people are found mostly on the hilltop areas such as the Koubru hill summit, Thangjeeng hilltop, Cheengthang hill peak, etc. All these accounts are kept in the mythical or legendary contexts. This trend of settlement pattern is followed upto the early period of the ancient historical time. This fact is evidenced by the settlement areas of Luwang Makubi Cheeng or hill of Hongnem Luwang Ningthou Punsiba, Selloi-Langmaicheeng/Nongmai jeeng of Pureiromba, King or chief of the Angom Clan.

### **3.2.3. Megalithic phase**

The customs of erecting “mega”-big; “lithic”-stone/rock, simply meaning, deployment of huge boulder to mark a death of a person has been evidently branded in regions of south and east India. It is a living tradition of certain tribes in north-eastern regions of the sub-continent especially in Nagaland and Manipur. Some important Megalithic sites in Manipur are Ukhrul, Keithemanbi, Mao Maran, Salangthel, willong, Maring area, Tharon, Khoupum, etc.

At Maran an avenue of stones is found at the outskirts, another circle of stone is found inside Maram. A stone hang, a flat stone supported by four vertical stones of recent early historical period is also found. Cairn burial type or heaps of stone, which are conically erected, are found at Willong and Keithelmanbi belonging to the Tangkhul and Koirang tribes. There are Menhirs at Tharon Khullen which is associated with the Liangmei tribes.

At Salangthel, Dr.L. Kunjeswori Devi, Associate Professor in the Department of History, Manipur University along with a team from the Mutua Museum located a complex of Megaliths, which is believed to have belonged to the Kom tribes, running in north-south direction and crossing another row, which is in east-west direction. And another chain of Megaliths running from north-south and east-west is found

towards the north of Salangthel at about 1300m (a.s.l). These are of menhir type and one is cairn type of Megalithic burial.

### Rock engravings

It is seen that rock engravings in Manipur are associated with the Megaliths. It is found at Tharon, Khoupum and Salangthel. The Fiyangu river bed at Tharon caves, Tamenglong District, exhibit rock engravings of different designs at five different places depicting animals, human beings, human hands and a number of different signs. They include geometric and non geometric figures. It also includes a composite figure of animals and human. There are three rows of animal figures, the first line contains fifteen heads of Mithun, the second and third lines thirty four and four heads of pigs respectively. Above the first line there are three figures of houses. Above and below these three lines, there are two anthropomorphic figures one above and another below the lines.

Kama is another river bed which also bears engravings. This includes human legs and hands both in pairs and single. Some of the footprints bear seven toes, some five toes but some are without toes. The irregularity in the number of toes does not indicate any distinctive feature other than the convenience of the maker. Floral designs and inscriptions are also associated with the engravings. According to the tradition, the bride and bridegroom use to visit these caves and engrave there in commemoration of their marriage.

A peak called Khoupum, is situated above 1454.55m (a.s.l) to the south of Cachar road and lies on the bank of the Irang River. The hill ranges here exhibits more than fifty engraved stones. The engravings are found at Mai Taobut 1454.53m, Phoichengkhek 1045.55m, Pengdon Daitaos 118.82m high, Khoupum Ching Kao and Khoupum etc. These engravings include footprints of children and adults, which are in pairs or singles, gong, game board, wine jar, gun, sword, counting lines, measuring figure, hilt, oblong shield, cross, symbol of female genital organ, variety of flower, lotus, spear head, dish, bird, hunter with gun. The biggest amongst the fifty engraves stones faces north; its height is 3.04 m and 6.70 m wide. The engravings include birds and animal figures of horse buffalo head, dish, spear head, gun, wine jar, etc. One striking feature of this engraved stone is the inscription in Bengali script in all the four corners, as follows: My father's name is Hunglingam; Shri Atomba Nga Shri

Gopilang Kabui; It had been written since Cheithum, then mother wrote again; Gainilungpou Naga Kao wrote and Shangkhoupum Kangjapui observed it.

On the hill ranges of Salangthel near Moirang, there are more engraving stones. On a flat horizontal stone is engraved the symbol of a female genital organ. A flat ridge about 1 km north of Salangthel bears cluster of Megaliths and flat horizontal stones with footprints engraved on them.

### **3.2.4. Historical Phase**

The settlement of the people in the valley of Manipur appeared to have started during the proto historical period of Manipur. With the foundation of Ningthouja/Meitei principality by Meitei Lord Nongdalairen Pakhangba by driving out the Khabas and their allies the Ngabas (Chapas), and fraction of the Thangyi or Chenglei/ Sarang-Leishang from the central portion of the valley of Manipur (Kangleipung), the settlement area of the Meitei/ Ningthouja became the central portion of Manipur, the present town of Imphal. According to the Khunthong Latpa(manuscript), the boundary of the dominion of Nongda Lairen is provided as Achanbee-kei on the north, Khurai Ahongpung (the present Tellipati area) on the east, Kakwa Lamdaibung on the south and Tera Wangthonbi-pung on the west. The previous settlement area of the Angom and the Wang/Ningthouja, as the descendants of two brothers (Kuptreng and Sentreng) of the Wang family is given as the Awang Phatlou Laimaton (the area from where the Kongba river emerges as its source). Even though the consolidation of the principalities and their powers were started since the regime of Meitei-lord Nongda Leiren Pakhangba the work was completed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. for the consolidation of the principalities under the banner of the Ningthouja/Meitei and the total unification to construct the Meitei nation was completed during the regime of Meitei-Lord Garib Niwaz (1709-48 A.D.) in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. thus the composite and mixed up settlement of the people of the seven clans, even though began since the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.were vigorously proceeded since the regime of Meitei lord Kyamba (A.D.1467-1508). During the regimes of Meitei-lord Khagemba (A.D.1597-1652) and Garib Niwaz any plain settler belonging to one of the seven clans could settle to any place /village whichsoever he/she chose to dwell.

The people of Manipur as provided by the Meitei scriptures and archaeological findings in the main theme were the hill-dwellers. The main tribes who had settled in

the historical days in Manipur are the Kabuis, the Chothes, Koireng, etc on the western hills, the Mao, the Thangkhuls, the Thanggal, and the Maram on the eastern hills and the Anals Koms, Kabuis, Lamgang, Mayon, Monsang, Aimol, etc are on the southern and south-eastern hills of Manipur.

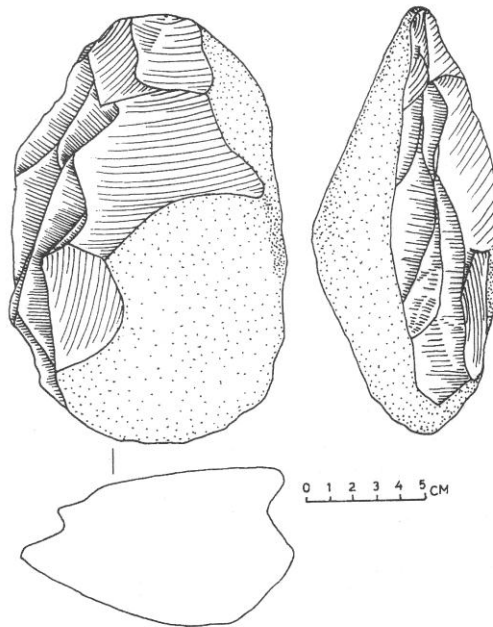
The history of the Nonthouja clan started from Lord Nong-da-Lairel Pakhangba (33 A.D) till King Kula Chandra (1890 A.D). This Nonthouja period had several lacunae during which period, the kingdom was kingless. Several minor and major Burmese invasions have left a mark in the cultural fronts in the Meitei society. One of the main causes of Burmese invasion was due to the internal usurps amongst the royal bloods, resulted in the Seven Years Devastation from 1819-1825 A.D. This Great Devastation is well known in the history of Manipur as the *Chahi Taret Khuntakpa*.

The time frame of the research falls in the late Medieval Period when Manipur was in a stage of turmoil on the religious front because of the fanatic King Garib Niwaz (1709-1748 A.D). This was also a time period when many Burmese invasions took place, resulting in acculturation.

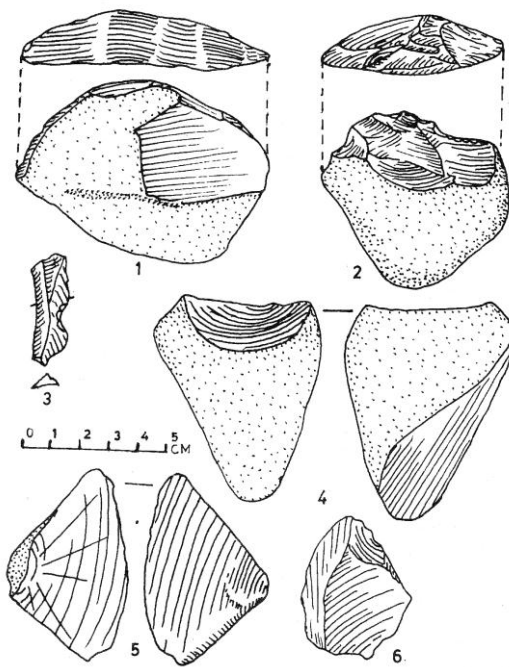
**Table: 3**

**Period Demarcation of the Kingdom of Manipur**

End Period	King	Beginning Period	King
Ancient History	King Irengba (984-1074 A.D.)	Early Medieval	King Loiyamba (1074-1122 A.D.)
Early Medieval	Pitambar Charai Rongba (1698-1709 A.D.)	Late Medieval	<b>Pamheiba/Gopal Garib Niwaz (1709-1748 A.D)</b>
Late Medieval	Marjit Singh (1814-1819 A.D.)	Modern Age	Yumjao Taba (1821-1823 A.D.)



A large Chopper made on sandstone pebble from Nongpok Keithelmanbi Loc. 2.



Hoabinhian artifacts from Nongpok Keithelmanbi Loc1. 1, Steep retouched round edged tool ; 2, pebble scraper 3, blade with a side notch ; 4, split pebble with a notch edge ; 5-6, flakes.

Courtesy (Singh, 1999)

**Fig. 4. Prehistoric Stone Tools**