

Socio-Economic Conditions of the Lois of Manipur before the 19th Century

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Abstract

The word 'Loi' is generally associated with degraded, subdued, dependents, outcaste and low-caste people of Manipur. There are many villages inhabited by the Lois scattering in the valley of Manipur except Kwatha which is situated in Chandel District, a hilly district. Some of the prominent Loi villages are Phayeng, Sekmai, Andro, Khurkhul, Koutruk, Tairenpokpi, Leimaram, Thongjao, Chairen, Kakching, Kakching Khunou, Heirol, Wangjing, Sugnu, Thanga, etc. There was a historical background for the emergence of the Lois. Original Lois were inhabitants of this State long before Pakhangba- who ascended the throne in 33 A.D. Later on, they were subdued by the successive Meitei Kings. Hence, the name Loi-meaning 'subdued' was given to them after their subjection. Then, the population of Lois gradually increased owing to the migration of various ethnic groups, the additions of war captives and sending those bad characters, committed crimes against the Kingdom to Loi villages were created by the successive kings to assign specific economic activities for the Kingdom. In native rule in Manipur, the Lois were the backbone of the economy of the State despite of the fact that they were socially in inferior position. This paper is an attempt to trace the origin of Lois in Manipur. At the same time the paper will discussed socio-economic condition of the Lois in Manipur before the 19th Century.

Key words: Chakpas, Hinduism, Lois, Loi villages, Manipuri and Meitei Hindus.

Introduction:

The word 'Loi' is generally associated with the degraded, subdued dependents, outcaste and low caste people of Manipur. According to N. Khelchandra, a reputed scholar of Manipur, the word 'Loi' means subdued or those who pay tribute to a sovereign. (Singh 1978:60) To M. Kirti Singh, a renowned scholar of Manipur, it is obviously connected with the degraded or subdued groups. (Singh 1985:21-23) Again, the word 'Lois' can be used as a prefix or suffix in Manipuri vocabulary to express different meanings. For example, it is used in such expressions as 'Loi Thaba' – to exile in Loi villages or expulsions from Manipur to a place outside, 'Loi Kaba'- to return from exile, 'Loi Okpa'- to receive somebody while returning from exile, 'Loi Haba'- to pay tribute to a conquering country/power, 'Loi Kaba' – to pay tribute to a conquering power, 'Loi Chanba'- to conquer a country, 'Loi Thokpa'- to kill, etc. (Maibam 1997:1)

There are many villages inhabited by the Lois scattering in the valley of Manipur except Kwatha which is situated in Chandel District, a hill district of Manipur. Some of the prominent Loi villages are Phayeng, Sekmai, Andro, Khurkhul, Koutruk, Tairenpokpi, Leimaram, Thongjao, Chairen, Kakching, Kakching Khunou, Heirol, Wangjing, Sugnu, Thanga, etc.

Objectives of the present paper:

The main objectives of the present paper are :

1. To trace the origin of the Lois.
2. To discuss their socio-political status during the native rule in Manipur.
3. To examine their role in the economic life of the kingdom of Manipur before the 19th Century.

Methodology of the present paper:

The methodology of the present study is explorative and descriptive in nature. The main sources of this paper are secondary sources mainly based on books and archival records. In this paper the terms Meitei and Manipuri carry the same meaning.

Results and Discussion:

A. Origin of Loi communities and their social status:

The *Chakpas* were the early inhabitants of Kangla prior to Meidingu Nongda Lairen Pakhangba's accession to the throne at Kangla in 33 A.D. Pakhangba became King of the Meiteis. Although they were subdued by Pakhangba, the *Chakpas* continued to

settle at different pockets of Kangla.(Kullachandra 1993: 4) Thus, some scholars like M. Kirti stated that the term *Loi* (subdued people) was applied to these people when Pakhangba subdued the *Chakpas*. (Singh 1985:21-23) But it is a controversial issue that the term *Loi* was originated in this incident in which Pakhangba subdued the *Chakpas*. For, there was no record or evidence to show the term *Loi* was applied to the *Chakpas* when they were subdued by Pakhangba. On the hand, there were various records which showed that they were included in the division of the Meitei society based on *salai* (which was something like clan, the members of which regard them as being descended from a common ancestor) which was introduced by Pakhangba to prohibit cohabitation among the same blood relatives.(Amubi 1994:1) For example, in the seven *salais* recorded by *Khagemba Yumbi*, an ancient text of the Meiteis, recorded that *Haokha Lokkha* which (now in Sugnu and surrounding regions) belonged to the *Chakpa* community, was one of the *salais* of the Meitei community.(Amubi 1994:128) Again, in ancient text like *Chakpa Khundarol*, it was also recorded that the descendants of the *Chakpas* merged into the seven *salais* of the Meiteis, namely *Seringpa* to *Angom Salai*, *Serangpa* to *Ningthouja Salai*, *Menangpa* and *Kanangpa* to *Luwang Salai*, *Yaorapa* to *Khaba Salai*, *Kasangpa* to *Sarang-Leisangthem Salai*, *Mochikpa* to *Moirang Salai* and *Momonpa* to *Khuman Salai*.(Kullachandra 1993:4) These facts mean that the *Chakpas* included in seven *salais* of the Meiteis.

In connection with the term *Loi*, it is to be noted that the term *Loi* came to record for the first time denoting subdued and paying tribute to more powerful King during the reign of Meidingu Taothimang (264-364 A.D.), the grandson of Pakhangba. It was recorded that the villagers of *Haokha Lokha*, a village near Sugnu paid annual tribute i.e. *Loipot* to the king after killing *Kakyen Mingamba*, who was depicted in the form of a powerful bird.(Singh 2000:7) It is also said that the two brothers subdued the village. Thus, the term *Loi* and *Loi Chanba* was first applied to that category of people with reference to their dependant tributary status under the lordship of the Meitei Kings. However, we do not know as to when and how the *Chakpas* were made tributary subjects under the Meitei Kings.

About the *Lois*, T.C. Hodson, an Assistant Political Agent to Manipur observed, “The *Lois*, a title applied to the inhabitants of a number of villages which are some distance from Imphal, and which are and have for long been in subjection to the Meiteis, are of various origin.” (Hodson 1989:9-10) He further elaborated that they were said both by the Meiteis and their own traditions to be the descendants of the *autochthons* of the country, who were disposed of their fertile lands by the Meiteis. (Hodson 1989:65) According to W. Ibohal Singh, a scholar of Manipur, the *Chakpas* were also called *Loi*, a name given to a Tai tribe to denote another name of the Tai.(Singh 1986:146) P. Gogoi, an eminent scholar of Assam spelt out that Tai is synonymous with the name *Dai*, *Li*, *Lai*, *Loi* are but other form of *Dai*.Hence the above change from *Dai* to *Lai*, *Loi* or *Li* is quite possible .(Gogoi 1999:7) G.E. Gerini also mentioned, “The *Hoi* of Champa and the *Li*, *Le*, *Loi*, or *Lai* of Hainan are probably the same people as the *Lawa*, or that at any rate they belong to the same stock. The term *Doi* =*Loi* =*Hoi* = *Li*, *Le*, or *Lai* becomes thus explained as meaning ‘mountaineers’ or hill people.”(Gerini 1974:131)Thus, all the places close to where the *Loi* are believed to have settled were known as *Loi-ya-ram* meaning place close to *Loi*. And, the hill range close to the habitation of *Loi* was called *Loi-jing* meaning *Loi* hill or Hill of the *Loi* or *Loi-pi-ching* meaning hill of the *Lois*. The *Loi* and the *Poirei* - another name of Meitei in the very earlier times - looked down each other but the *Poirei* grew more powerful and began to subdue the *Loi* people. Thus, the terms *Loi-Thaba* meaning to send into exile and *Loi-Chanba* to conquer continued to mean the degradation position of the *Loi* community. Since then, the *Chakpas* were given the name ‘*Loi*’ meaning subdued. In short, the word *Loi* generally associated with the degraded, subdued dependents, outcaste and low caste people. (Maibam1997:1)

The *Chakpas*, tried, sometimes, to assert their independent political status against the Meitei Kings whom the latter tried to subjugate them. During the reign of Meidingu Naophangba (428-518 A.D.), the *Chakpas* became very powerful and settled at ten villages at the Nongmaiching Hills. The King thought that they might create problems in his Kingdom; so he arranged the settlement areas of these people at different places of the valley especially near the hilly route areas.(Singh 1986:147-48) The main reason for the settlement of the *Chakpas* near the hilly routes was to defend the Meitei Kingdom from the intrusions of the hilly tribes and other people who were of foreign origin.(Singh and Singh 1967:48-49) Despite of being dispersion of the *Chakpas* at different places of the valley of Manipur, they sometimes became powerful and resented the Meitei Kings’ wishes. So, there were many records of sending expeditions against the *Chakpas* for their subjugation. Meidingu Loiyumba (1074-1122 A.D.) sent expeditions against the *Chakpas*. He sent his brother-in-law, Angom King Lanthaba to punish *Chakpa Sekta* in 1101 A.D. and capture some Sekta leaders like Chakpa Tao, Akong Tao etc.(Kullachandra 1993:9-10) Meidingu Chingthang Lanthaba (1131-42 A.D.) defeated *Chakpa Kamu* who settled at Selloi Mapithel and captured Kamu King Yekcham Puleirong Athouba.(Singh and Singh 1967:9) Meidingu Puranthaba (1247-63 A.D.) also sent expedition against the *Chakpas* who settled at Khongchi Yainalokta and captured their King Arok Akhuba Ating Ayang Athouba. Evidence show that Meidingu Kongyamba (1324-35 A.D.), fought with the *Chakpas* at Lamangdong (Bishenpur) Meidingu Kabomba (1524-42 A.D.) defeated Chakpa Pungpum of Sekmai Khalpokta in 1527 A.D.(Singh and Singh 1967:13) Meidingu Mungyanba (1562-97 A.D.) also defeated *Chakpa Pungpun* and captured *Chakpa Konongsa* and Panganba. He also defeated *Chakpa Chirang*. Meidingu Khagemba (1597-1652 A.D.) also sent expedition against *Chakpa Pungpun*.(Chakpa Khundalon:M.S.) Meidingu Khunjaoba (1652-66 A.D.) also seem to have had trouble with the combination of the *Chakpa* villages of Andro and other villages of Tangkhul Chingsang (near south-eastern side of the Baruni Hills) like Karong, Ngaikhong, Sharang, Nungpang, Wakching, Lengkhlu, Lenglung, Shikhong, Kamu, Yairipok etc. under the initiative of Tangkhul tribes of the area.(Singh and Singh 1967:34) Meidingu Paikhomba (1666-97 A.D.) also sent expedition against the emerging *Chakpa* Sekmai and defeated them. The *Chakpa* leaders Kidi Chakpa, Hochikpa, Hokham, Kelengba, Ke Khamba were captured and all *Chakpa* Sekmai villages were made to settled at Keipung of Thoubal.(Singh and Singh 1967:43) Such series of expeditions by the Meitei Kings against the

Chakpas clearly show that the Meiteis did not want to tolerate their independent status. Consequently, they accepted the dominance of the Meiteis.

From the above discussion, it is seemed that the term *Loi* has another meaning describing their origin. Then, it was applied categorically to those people who were brought under the suzerainty of the Meiteis to mark their dependent tributary status under the lordship of the Meitei Kings. (Singh 1994: 41-43)

In later times, it denotes their social status. The status of the *Lois* was socially degraded due to many factors. The most important factor was the sending of those people including bad characters to *Loi* villages as a punishment for disobeying the order of the Kings and for committing crimes. In due course, the descendants of such people also became *Lois*. (McCulloch 1980:13) *Loi* villages thus became the places of confinement of those people who defied the orders of the Kings and for committing crimes. Here, it is worth mentioning that the term *Loi Thaba* (sending as *Loi* for committing crime) was first introduced by Meidingu Naokhamba (411-428 A.D.) as a punishment for challenging the King. (Chinglen 2005: 44-45) His son Meidingu Naophangba (428-518 A.D.) as a way of punishment also sent those people who commit crimes against the King as *Lois*. (Chinglen 2005: 53) Meidingu Puranthaba (1247-63 A.D.) continued this old practice by sending those people who committed crimes at *Loi* villages. (Bhogeshor 1967:158-61) McCulloch, a Political Agent to Manipur also spelt out that as a punishment a Manipuri was sometimes degraded to a *Loee* (*Loi*). Thus he wrote, "After a short time it is usually remitted, but if not, no punishment could be more severe, for it affects not only the individual himself, but his family and descendants, who all become *Loees* (*Lois*). The inhabitants of the village of Shoogoonoo (Sugunu) are inhabited by the way of punishment." (McCulloch 1980:13-14) T.C. Hodson also mentioned that "the villages on the Logtak (Loctak) Lake, Thanga and Ithing, are known to have had their origin as had Shuganu (Sugunu) on the banks of the Imphal river, as penal settlement to which all classes of offenders were sent. (Hodson 1987:9) Saroj Nalini Paratt, an expert on the culture of Manipur also observes, "Exile to *Loi* villages, either permanently or temporarily, was a traditional punishment for Manipuris who had committed crimes against the King and the State, and in later times became roughly equivalent to outcaste for the Hindu Manipuris." (Paratt 1980:4)

In later years, Gharib Niwaz alias Pamheiba (1707-48 A.D.) who was responsible for professing the Manipuris into Hinduism, deported a large number of non-converts to *Loi* villages. Since then, the Manipur's Royal Chronicle i.e. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* constantly make mention of deportation to *Loi* villages as a punishment. (Hodson 1987:9-10) During his reign, Hinduism became the State religion of Manipur through severe methods. He forbade domestication of hen, duck and pig etc, distilling and drinking of wine, and eating meat. Those who defied the King's order were sent to *Loi* villages. (Singh 2000:32) During the reign of Bhagyachandra (1763-98 A.D.), the Hindu customs and religious practices were generally popularized and accepted in Manipur. He also sent many people who committed crimes like cow eating etc. to *Loi* villages. (Singh 1949: 78-79 and 85-86) Hinduism, thus, in later period became very popular in Manipur and those who defied Hinduism were treated as *Lois* and sent them to *Loi* villages. For this reason, L. Bino Devi in her book *Lois of Manipur* observes, "They might not have been known as *Lois* had they embraced Hinduism with the rest of the Meiteis. The communities were isolated from the mainstream with the title of *Lois* because they practiced the traditional religions of Meiteis when the King ordered the Meiteis to adopt Hinduism. They got the title of *Loi* for defying the orders of the King but they have retained the culture, traditions and religion of the Meiteis." (Devi 2002:45) In recent past the *Loees* (*Lois*) were looked down upon and kept apart from the mainstream of the Meitei Hindu population. (McCulloch 1980:13) However, M. Kirti observes that their degradation in the social status is not due to their occupation but to their mode of eating and clothing. (Singh 1985:20) Thus intermarriage and co-dining with the *Lois* was strictly prohibited. The segregation became more sharpened as it took of ritual character in the wake of mass acceptance of Hinduism by the Meiteis in the 18th Century. (Singh 1994: 41) The socio-political status of *Lois*, thus, lowered, after the mass acceptance of Hinduism by the Meiteis.

The *Lois*, despite of their lower social status accorded, it was also recorded that they could become Meiteis again, provided that they gave up their *Lois*' habit of food and drink. This naturally compelled them to give up the manufacture of country liquor which was not only their profession but also means of earning. (Singh 1994:41) At one time, they could become Meiteis if the King was pleased. (Singh 1949:36) They were also entitled for consideration to be Meitei Kshatriyas after undergoing some ceremonies of an initiating nature. In this connection, Mc Culloch, the then Political Agent to Manipur mentioned that apostates cannot at once return to their old standing, but Nagas or *Loees* (*Lois*) may at once profess Hinduism, and receive the thread of the Kshatree (*Lugoon* in Manipuri). The Raja, Brahmins and male members of the royal family, give the thread indiscriminately, but to receive it from the Raja and became his disciple seems to be the preferred method. (McCulloch 1980:18)

If the king pleased, a low birth could become a high caste Kshatriya. Thus, the religious policy of the Meitei Kings under the influence of Hinduism had already brought many of the *Loi* villages within the fold of Hinduism. However, in spite of their conversion into Meitei and then Hinduism, they were not permitted to marry with the girls of the Meitei community. However, if the King pleased, even a low caste man can marry a Brahmin girl. About such cases, E.W. Dun, a former intelligent officer of British India observes, "A low caste man may even marry a Brahmin woman, and his children become Brahmins. It is needless to say that all this is utterly opposed to all orthodox Hinduism." (Dun 1981:14)

The population of *Lois* gradually increased owing to the migration of various ethnic groups and the addition of war captives. According to L. Iboongohal Singh, there are many outsiders from Takhel (Assam), Tekhao (Tripura) and Kabo (present Myanmar) and very high class Meitei Hindus in the *Loi* community. (Singh 1987:19) Saroj Nalini Parratt also observes, "The *Loi* community has been enlarged by migrants of various ethnic origin and hill people (Manipur). Exile to *Loi* villages either permanently or temporarily, was a traditional punishment of Manipuris who had committed crimes against the king and the State. Later, they became outcasts of Hindu Manipuris. There is a good deal of aristocratic Meitei blood among the *Lois*." (Parrat 1980:4) The population of *Lois* further increased with the settlement of migrated Mayang Kalishas or *Bishnupriyas* at the *Loi* villages at the instances of the Meitei Kings. G.A. Grierson also opined, "There is also a degraded class called *Khalachaiya* or *Bishnupriya* which consists of the descendants of doms, and other Bengali of low castes. Their occupations were originally that of supplying grass to the royal stables. They speak a different dialect which is, in fact, closely allied to vulgar Bengali." (Grierson 1967:20) The term '*Loi*' which first was applied to that category of people with reference to their dependent tributary status under the lordship of the Meitei Kings, thus, changed its original meaning after intermingling with the immigrants and war captives.

The King established many *Loi* villages for those immigrant *Lois* by assigning their suitable occupations or by ordering the task of defending the valley from the hostile hill tribes and the invaders from neighbouring States. (Kullachandra 1993: 9) From the above discussion, the *Lois* of Manipur can be classified into four groups according to the nature of their origin, namely (1) *Lois* by birth which include the original *Loi* villages of the *Chakpas* and *Khurkhul*, (2) *Lois* by way of punishment- this group of people were allowed to settle at Sugnu, Ithai, Thanga, Yaithibis, etc., (3) Immigrant *Loi* community which include *Khangabok*, *Wangjing*, *Heirok*, *Nachou*, etc., and (4) *Lois* as captives of war who are now in *Kameng*, *Susa-Kameng*, etc.

B.Economic status of the Lois of Manipur before the 19th century:

In course of time, these *Loi* villages were assigned to profess various occupations. According to the nature of their traditional occupations, the *Lois* can be divided into (1) *Lang Lois*, (2) *Thum Lois*, (3) *Yot Lois*, (4) *Sel Lois*, (5) *U-Lois*, (6) *Phusaba Lois* and (7) *Nga-Lois*. (Tampak *Loi Mashin*:n.d.) They are briefly discussed as follows:

Lang Lois:

'*Lang*' in Manipuri means spun thread. So, *Lang Lois* were those *Loi* villages which supplied yarns of silk to the King as tribute. *Lang Loi* villages were *Susa-Kameng*, *Khurkhul*, *Koutruk*, *Chakpa Khunou* (*Tairenpokpi*) and *Leimaram*.

Thum Lois:

Thum means salt in Manipuri. *Thum Lois* were those *Lois* who manufactured salt and gave monthly salt as tribute to the King. *Thum Loi* villages were *Waikhong*, *Shikhong*, *Ningel*, *Chandrakhong*, etc.

Yot Lois:

In Manipuri, iron ore are known as *Yot*. The *Lois* who were smelters of iron were known as *Yot Lois*. They paid the wrought iron to the King as tribute. All the necessary iron ores for making swords, spears, etc. of the State were supplied by them. The *Yot Loi* villages were *Kakching Khullen*, *Kakching Wairi*, *Kakching Khunou*, *Langathel*, etc.

Sel Lois:

Sel means money in Manipuri. *Se -Lois* were those *Loi* villages who mint the bell-metal coins. They paid belt-metal coins as tribute to the King. *Sel Loi* villages were *Leishangkhong*, *Nachou*, *Ningthoukhong*, *Khangabok*, etc.

U-Lois

U-Lois were those *Loi* villages who paid tribute to the King in the form of timber. All the necessary timber for making houses, boats, etc. of the King were supplied by them. *U-Loi* villages were *Wangoo*, *Nungoo* and *Sugunu*.

Phusaba Lois:

Phusaba Lois were those *Loi* villages which made earthen pots. They paid tribute in the form of earthen pots. *Phusaba Loi* villages were *Andro*, *Thoubaldong*, *Khombitok Chairel*, *Taonthong*, *Thongjao*, etc.

Nga Lois:

Nga Lois were those villages whose main occupation was catching fishes specially from the *Loktak Lake*. They supplied fishes as tributes to the king, In other words, the daily items of fishes of the King's kitchen were supplied by them through *Ngarunghanba*, the officer in-charge of King's fishes. *Nga Loi* villages were *Thanga*, *Arong*, *Moirang*, *Ithing*, *Karang*, etc.

C.The Lois in traditional economic system of Manipur:

The *Lois* during the native rule in Manipur, were the most hard working and useful class of people in the valley. (Brown 1975:14) Different *Loi* villages as discussed above had different occupations which were suited to their villages respectively and

which were denied to the *Panna* Meiteis. McCulloch said, "The *Loi* population is exceedingly useful. Amongst them are the silk manufactures, the smelters of iron, the distillers of spirits, the makers of earthen vessels for containing water or for cooking in, the cutters of posts and making of beams and canoes, manufacturers of salt, fishers, cutters of grass for the Raja's ponies, the payers of tribute in *Sel*, the coin of the country, etc." (McCulloch 1980:13) Hodson also observed "Another matter in connection with the manufactures of the Manipuri; nearly all the real manufactures are now in the hands of the *Loi* communities, and while among the Manipuri, we have weaving as a general industry with one or two families exercising special forms of this craft, they practice few other manufactures, and are carpenters, black smiths, jewelers, workers in brass, metal castors, bone setters and house builders." (Hodson 1989:13)

The sources of revenue of the Government of Manipur during the native rules in Manipur were (i) land revenue, (2) mines, (3) forest, (4) herds, (5) duties from trade and commerce, (6) revenue in the form of services, (7) foreigners' tax, (8) fines, (9) tributes from the vanquished, hills and valley, and (10) fisheries. (Singh 2003:143) After the land and house tax, the principal sources of revenue to the State were forest, fisheries, foreigners' tax, salt, the amount which was annually paid by the Government of the British India in compensation for the cession of the Kubo valley to Burma. (Singh 2003:167-68)

Of the mineral products which were also sources of revenue of the State, salt was the most important. Salt was mainly obtained from the brine wells located at the *Loi* villages of Shikhong, Ningel, Chandrakhong, Waikhong, Chalou, Torbung and Chibu. (Singh 2003:153) The whole of the wells named above belonged to the King of Manipur. The salt manufacturers and the employed labourers of salt manufacturing were worked for the benefit of the State. All men employed in drawing and evaporating the water were Manipuris of the *Loi* caste. (Hodson 1989:153)

Fishery like salt manufacturing was also largely in the hands of the *Lois*. They supplied the loyal kitchen's different kinds of fish through the *Ngarunghanba* i.e. the fishery officer. And each fishing family also paid a monthly tax of about Rs. 2-4. This meant that the State enjoyed large revenue from fisheries. (Hodson 1989:46)

The silk industry which was also a source of income of the State was also belonged to this section of the community. Pottery was also done by the *Lois* of Andro, Chairen, Sugnu, Thongjao and Thoubalkhong, Distilling was found in almost all the *Loi* villages. Iron smelting was at the hands of Kakching, and the surrounding villages.

The *Lois*, not only did all the manufacturing works which became one of the important source of revenue of the State, but also paid tribute to the King. The tribute of Kakching included swords, iron ores, bowls and dishes. The village of Sugunu paid pines in tribute. Pottery making villages like Chairen and Thoubalkhong annually offered earthen pots. Wine manufacturing villages like Sekmai provided pots of paddy and pitchers of wine especially for the Kuki soldiers of the King. (Singh 2003:143) About silk manufacturers, Hodson quoted, "About 300 persons are employed in the silk culture, and they pay for the privilege some 300 rupees annually; they are for this payment excused from the operation of *Lallup* or forced labour." (Hodson 1989:31)

The above discussion shows that all productive and manufacturing hard works were done by the *Lois*. And at the same time all manual works which were despised by the Meiteis were done by them. They were the real chief revenue earners of the State. So, they can be taken as the backbone of the traditional economy of Manipur during the native ruled in Manipur.

D. Main findings of this paper:

The main findings of this paper are as follows:

1. The word '*Loi*' is generally associated with the degraded, subdued dependents, outcaste and low caste people of Manipur.
2. The term '*Loi*' came to record for the first time during the reign of Meidingu Taothimang, the Meitei king who ruled Manipur during the third and fourth century A.D. when Haokha Lokha, a *Chakpa* village, paid annual dependent tribute to the king.
3. With the adoption of Hinduism by the Meiteis, the social discrimination of the '*Lois*' by the Meitei Hindus became more sharpened.
4. The '*Lois*', despite of their lower social status, could also become higher status Meitei Hindus if the reigning Meitei king was pleased and if they converted to Hinduism through performing some ceremonies associated with it.
5. Through the various works allotted to them, they were the backbone of the economy of Manipur during the native rule in Manipur.

Conclusion:

The *Lois* were the outcaste and lower section of the Hinduised Meitei society during the native rule in Manipur. There is still a debate about their origin in Manipur. Earlier, they were denoted as dependent tributary status under the lordship of the Meitei Kings. Later on, due to (a) sending of those bad characters including those who committed crimes against the King, (b) migration of various ethnic groups, (c) the addition of war captives, etc. to *Loi* villages, made the social status of *Lois* much lowered. At the same time, despite of their low socio-political status, they were the backbone of the economy of the kingdom of Manipur since all the

despised works of the Meitei Hindus were done by them to maintain the economy of the kingdom. So, they were indispensable during the native rule especially before the 19th century in Manipur.

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