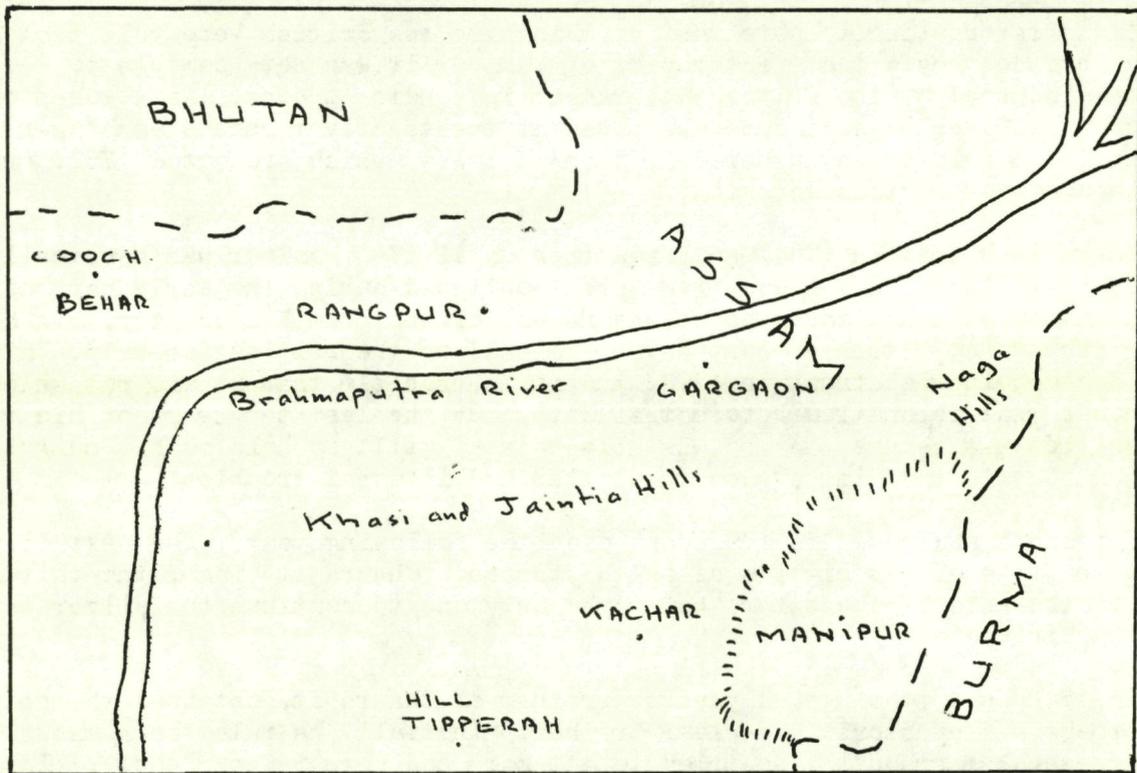


INDIA - THE COINAGE OF MANIPUR

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Manipur was a petty hill state on the south-east of Assam and bordering Burma. It's area was 8,638 square miles and the population in 1891 was about 221,000. The state consisted of an extensive valley in the heart of the difficult jungle and mountain country which stretches between Assam, Kachar, Burma and Chittagong. The only town of any size was the capital of Imphal, sited in the centre of the state. Communications with India and Burma were formerly very difficult and hazardous and the external trade of the state was restricted. European travellers to Manipur were infrequent in former times but from 1942 until 1945 Imphal and the surrounding area became the major base for operations against the Japanese in Upper Burma.



Historical Background (1)

The early history of Manipur is obscure, since written records more than 200 years old are virtually non-existent in that area. The traditions which do exist tell of frequent invasions from all sides, and the features of the inhabitants, which are part-mongoloid, part Indo-Aryan, testify to this.

The first noteworthy event recorded is that about 1714 (or 1709?) a Naga named Panheiba became ruler of Manipur, adopted the Hindu religion and took the name Gharib Niwaz. This ruler was successful in the frequent wars with Burma, although he did not make any permanent conquests.

Historical Background (Continued)

Gharib Niwaz was murdered, along with his eldest son in about 1750 and the rule passed first to his eldest surviving son Ajit Shah and then in 1756 to a younger son Bharat Shah. The earliest dated coins of Manipur were struck during this year of 1756, but in the name of Gaura Shah. It seems likely that Bharat Shah only ruled as Regent for Gaura Shah, the grandson of the murdered Gharib Niwaz, and although a cripple, the rightful heir. The coins of 1756 were probably struck on the occasion of the coronation as they record the exact day of this event.

Bharat Shah died in 1758, and Gaura Shah agreed to share his power with his brother Jai Singh, a much stronger individual. Soon after 1750, the Burmese, taking advantage of the death of Gharib Niwaz, had begun a series of invasions. By 1761 there was a grave danger that Manipur would fall to the Burmese and Jai Singh appealed to the British for help. This was granted, and in 1762 British soldiers helped the Manipuris to repulse the Burmese, and a treaty of alliance was signed.

It is interesting to note that at this time the British were told that as the Burmese had destroyed the greater part of Manipur, it was not possible to meet the expenses incurred by the British Government in sending troops. As a token of sincerity "500 meklee gold rupees, valued at twelve silver rupees each" were offered. The gold coins numbered 2, 3 and 4 below, which are dated 1762, must have been struck on this occasion.

Gaura Shah died in 1764, and from then until 1798 Manipur was hereditarily ruled by Jai Singh. Invasions from Burma continued during the early part of his reign, and on at least three occasions he was driven from his country, but he always managed to return without having to call on the British for help. His only known dated coin was struck in 1772, and it is probable that he was not able to hold his formal coronation before that date. By the last ten years of his reign his position was secure, and he was able to send military help to his neighbour in Assam, Gaurinatha Singh, when the latter had internal troubles.

Jai Singh abdicated in 1798, and died the following year. The next 35 years was to see five of his eight sons on the throne, Chaurajit Singh, the third of these brothers to become ruler, being the only one to continue the silver coinage begun by his uncle.

In 1812 Marajit Singh, a younger brother of Chaurajit, obtained the help of the Burmese and overthrew his elder brother. Initially he ruled as a vassal of the Burmese, but gradually he tried to act more and more independently. In 1819 he struck a fine gold coin but in the same year the Burmese finally lost patience with him and threw him out to join his brothers in Kachar.

This Burmese invasion did not stop at Manipur, and very quickly they managed to conquer the whole of Assam, bringing to an end the ancient Kingdom of the Ahoms. When the danger to British possessions in India became apparent, the British prepared to attack the Burmese, and in 1824 war was declared. Soon after, Gambhir Singh, the youngest of the brothers, asked the British for money and arms to help him recapture Manipur. This was readily granted and in 1826 Gambhir Singh, who had helped significantly in the defeat of the Burmese, was recognized as Raja of Manipur.

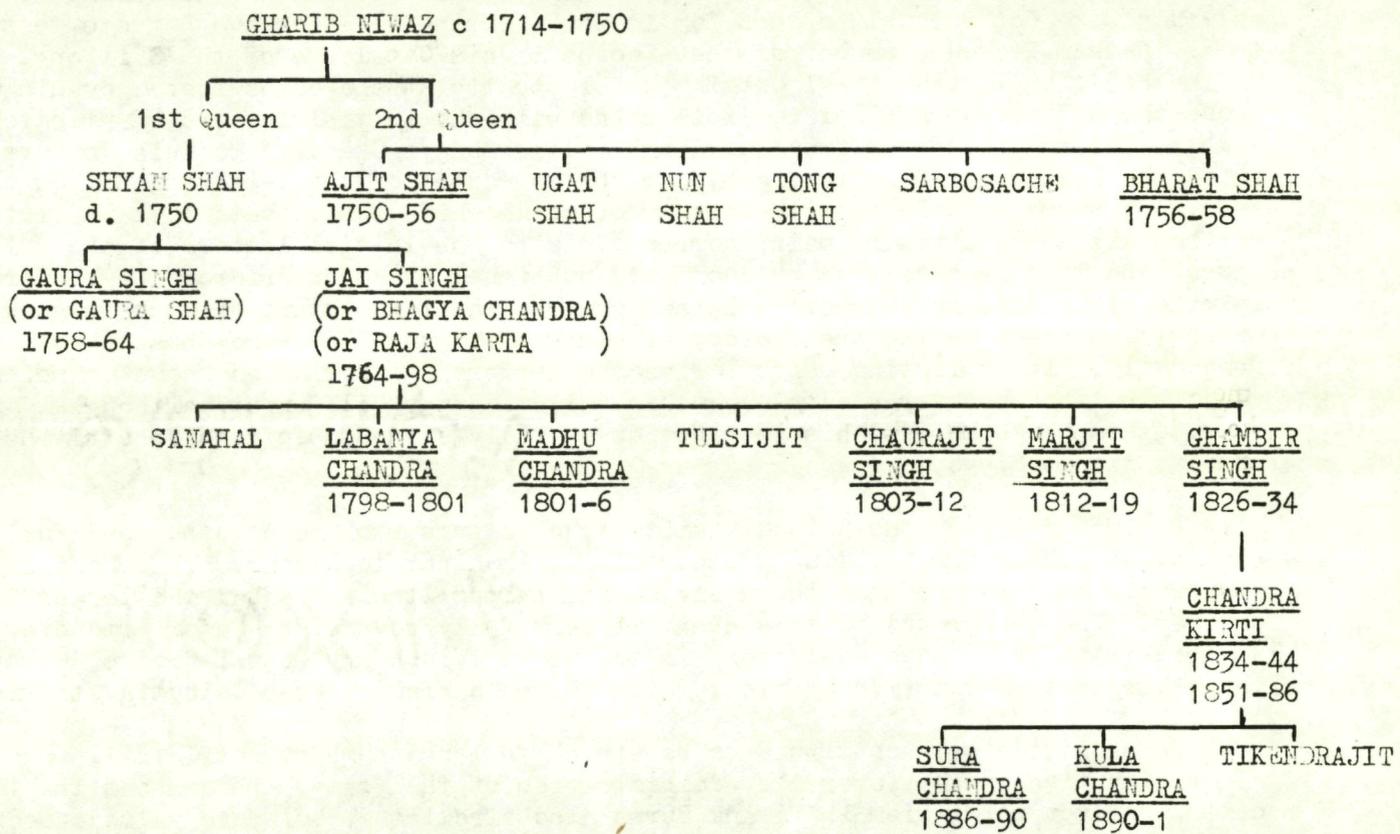
Gambhir Singh's rule continued peacefully until his death in 1834 leaving a son, Chandra Kirti, who was barely two years old. Nar Singh, a great grandson of Gharib Niwaz was appointed Regent. Chandra Kirti ruled nominally until 1844 when there was an unsuccessful attempt on Nar Singh's life. The Queen Mother was implicated and fled to Kachar with her son, and Nar Singh was made Raja.

Historical Background (Continued)

He was succeeded at his death in 1850 by his brother Debendra Singh, whose reign lasted only three months before Chandra Kirti, now 18 years old, took advantage of Debendra's unpopularity and recaptured his throne early in 1851. In spite of numerous attempts to overthrow him, Chandra Kirti managed to retain power until his death in 1886. He was succeeded by his son Sura Chandra, but in 1890 his brothers Kula Chandra and Tikendrajit Singh ousted him and Kula Chandra was made Raja.

The position inside Manipur rapidly deteriorated, and a full scale offensive was launched after several British Officials had been killed. Resistance was not strong and in March 1891 Tikendrajit was tried and later executed and Kula Chandra was deported for life. In September 1891 the Governor selected Chura Chandra Singh a descendent of Nar Singh to be Raja of Manipur, but the administration was now in British hands and never again was Manipur allowed to strike coins.

Descendants of Gharib Niwaz



Rulers of Manipur

Gharib Niwaz	1714-1750	Huidromba Subol	1819-1820
Ajit Shah	1750-1756	Gambhir Singh	1820-1821 1st reign
Bharat Shah	1756-1758	Jadu Singh	1822-1823
Gaura Singh	1758-1764	Raghab Singh	1823-1824
Jai Singh	1764-1798	Bhadra Singh	1824-1825
Labanya Chandra	1798-1801	Gambhir Singh	1825-1833 2nd reign
Madhu Chandra	1801-1806	Chandra Kirti Singh	1833-1843 1st reign
Chaurajit Singh	1803-1812	Nar Singh	1843-1849
Marjit Singh	1812-1819	Chandra Kirti Singh	1849-1886 2nd reign
		Sura Chandra Singh	1886-1890
		Kula Chandra Singh	1890-1891
		Chura Chandra Singh	1891-1940

Coinage

The coinage of Manipur has received scant attention up to now, probably because very few examples of the square silver and gold coins struck prior to 1812 have survived in Western collections. Marsden (2) published a few of the coins of Gaura Singh and Jai Singh and Thorburn published one rupee of Chaurajit Singh (3), but I know of no other records of these coins. The square coin of Gambhir Singh was published by S.P. Basu in JNSI for 1965. The reason for the scarcity of these coins is that they were usually only struck in small quantities for ceremonial use. Chaurajit Singh was the only ruler who seems to have made a real attempt to introduce silver coins into the currency, but most of his coins were carried away and melted by the Burmese during their occupation around 1820.

The only coins struck in any quantity in Manipur were the small bell-metal "sel".(4) The exact date of the introduction of these coins is not certain, but was probably during the second half of the eighteenth century. The coins were popular because they were suitable for the small purchases made by the inhabitants and they were not valuable enough for it to be worth-while for the Burmese to steal them. Botham listed a number of these coins in his Catalogue of the Shillong Cabinet (5), but I find it almost impossible to tie up the coins listed by him with those that I have seen. Botham lists coins with the initial letters of practically all the rulers of Manipur from Jai Singh (alias Bhagya Chandra) to Kula Chandra, but omits the letter "Sri", which is by far the commonest of the letters found on the sels. It seems certain from the dozens of coins which I have seen that the letters on the sels do not, in the main, correspond with the initial letters of the rulers' names, and this is confirmed by documents published by Major Pridmore (6). Here it is made clear that an auspicious letter was chosen at the start of each reign with no logic apparent behind the choice, although "Sri" and "Ma" were chosen most frequently. In my listing below I give the letters and varieties known to me, with an attribution wherever possible. Other varieties may well exist, although I feel that Botham may have used his imagination on badly struck specimens in arriving at some of his readings.

In 1838 and 1839 the Calcutta mint struck a number of sels to be used for payment of labour for building a new road from Manipur to Kachar. These coins were apparently better made than those struck in Manipur itself and had the letter "Ma" on them. The background to this event is very fully covered by Major Pridmore, but as neither he nor I have ever seen "Ma" coins that look any better produced than the other sels, I can give no clear guide for recognising these Calcutta strikings(7).

These little sels continued to be struck in large numbers until 1891, when the British finally took over the administration of the State. Throughout the 19th century silver coins from India and Burma also circulated, but were valued according to their metal content. The rate of exchange with the sels fluctuated with the price of silver; before 1838 a rupee was worth about 900 sel, but during that year the value dropped suddenly owing to a large influx of silver from India. From 1838 onwards the rupee exchanged for between 400 and 420 sels. Copper never circulated until after 1891, and one attempt by the British to introduce copper coins into the currency during the 1860's failed completely. After 1891 the British imposed Indian currency onto the inhabitants, and the sels gradually disappeared from circulation.

Notes:-

1. My historical summary is taken mainly from A. Roy's "History of Manipur", Calcutta 1952.
2. "Munismata Orientalia", London 1825.
3. "Notes on a Few Rare Indian Coins" JASB NS.XLII (1929).
4. An assay made in Calcutta mint in 1838 showed the metal content to be copper 73.6%. Tin 23.2% and Zinc 3.2%.

Notes (Continued)

5. "Catalogue of the Provincial Coin Cabinet Assam", Allahabad 1930.
6. "The East India Company's Bell Metal Coinage for Manipur 1838". Much of my information on the sels is taken from this very interesting article. (Seaby's Bulletin Dec. 1972).
7. The Coin illustrated by Major Fridmore is a badly struck "Sri" coin turned sideways.

Catalogue of Coins

Gaura Shah (or Gaura Simha) 1756-64

1. Gold Rupee. Dated 1678 (=1756 A.D.) Wt. 12.8 gms.
Obv. "Jesri Gaurasyah Manipureswara....."
Rev. "Vaisakh Sudhi..... 1 Samvat 1678"
2. Gold rupee. Dated 1684 (=1762 A.D.) Wt. 11.6 gms.
Obv. "Jesri Gaura Simha Manipureswara..... padani"
Rev. "Asara Sudhi..... 13 Samvat 1684"
3. Gold $\frac{1}{2}$ Rupee. Dated 1684 (=1762 A.D.) Wt. 5.8 gms.
Obv. "Jesri Gaura Simha Manipureswara"
Rev. "Asara Sudhi..... 13 Sam 1684"
4. Gold $\frac{1}{4}$ Rupee. Undated, but struck in 1762 A.D. Wt. 2.9 gms.
Obv. "Jesri Gaura Simha"
Rev. "Manipureswara"
5. Silver Rupee. Dated 1678 (=1756 A.D.) Wt. 12.7 gms.
Obv. "Jesri Gaura Shah Manipureswara....."
Rev. "Vaisakh Sudhi..... 1 Samvat 1678"

Uncertain 18th century

6. Silver Rupee. Barabarus inscription on both sides.

Jai Singh 1764-1798

7. Gold Rupee. Dated 1694 (=1772 A.D.) Wt. 11.6 gms.
Obv. "Jaya Simha Nripavarasya Saka 1694"
Rev. "Sri Sri Govindapada Suman Madhurkarasya"
8. Silver $\frac{1}{2}$ Rupee. Undated Wt. 5.9 gms.
Obv. "Sri Jaya Simhasya"
Rev. "Sri Govinda Deva"

Chaurajit Singh 1803-1812

9. Silver Rupee Dated 1728 (=1806 A.D.) Wt. 11.4 gms.
Obv. "Manipureswara Sri Sri Chaurajit Simha Nripavarasya Saka 1728"
Rev. "Sri Sri Radha Govinda Charana Ravinda Mugal Sevakasya"
- ✓ 10. Silver Rupee. Dated 1734 (=1812 A.D.) Also known for Wts. 11.1 -
1729 and 1732 11.4 gms.
Obv. "Srimanmanipureswara Sri Chaurajit Simha Nripavarasya Saka 1734"
Rev. "Sri Madradha Govindapada Ravinda Makaram Damano Radhu Karasya"

Catalogue of Coins (Continued)

Chaurajit Singh

11. Silver $\frac{1}{2}$ Rupee. Dated 1726 (=1804 A.D.)
 Obv. "Sri Chaurajit Simha Nripasya Saka 1726"
 Rev. "Sri Sri Radha Govinda Pada Sevaka"
12. Silver $\frac{1}{4}$ Rupee Dated 1726 (=1804 A.D.) Wt. 2.7 gms.
 Obv. "Sri Chaurajit Simhasya Saka 1726"
 Rev. "Sri Radha Govinda Pada Sevakasya"
13. Silver $\frac{1}{4}$ Rupee. Dated 1729 (= 1807 A.D.) Wt. 3.0 gms.
 Obv. "Sri Chaurajit Simhas Nripasya Saka 1729"
 Rev. "Sri Radha Govin Pada Man Madhu Kara"

Marjit Singh 1812 - 1819.

14. Gold Rupee. Dated 1741 (=1819 A.D.) Wt. 11.6 gms.
 Obv. "Srimanmanipuresvara Sri Marjit Simha Nripavarasya"
 Rev. As obverse, but Saka 1741 on last line.

Gambhir Singh 1826 - 1834.

15. Gold Rupee. Dated 1043 Chandrabdah (i.e. Lunar year)
 (= ?). Legend in Bangali. Wt. 11.4 gms.
 Obv. "Sri Gambhir Simha Nripavarasya Chandrabdah 1043"
 Rev. "Sri Radha Govinda Charan Sevakasya"

Anonymous Bell-metal Sels

All coins have a plain reverse. Weights vary widely from 0.4 to 1.5 gms. with a mean of about 0.7 gms.

16. Sel. "Sri" In fine style. Late 18th cent. to c 1890.
17. to Sel. "Sri" In a variety of styles. Mostly after 1826.
 22.
23. Sel. "Ma" This letter was being used in 1838 during the 1st reign of Chandra Kirti, and may have been used earlier. Presumably this letter was chosen as it is the initial letter of "Manipur", rather than the initial letter of Marajit Singh.
24. Sel. "Ra?" Both these pieces may have a crude version of the Bengali
 to letter "ra", said by Temple (IA 1898) to have been used
 25. by Nara Singh (1834-50).
26. Sel. "Ka" I do not know which ruler issued this type, but from the worn state of the very few examples I have seen, I think that it was probably struck before 1820.
27. Sel. "La" The specimens I have seen with this letter all show very little sign of wear. I think that it was struck late in the series, perhaps by Sura Chandra (1886-90). Certainly this type was not struck by Labanya Chandra as stated by Botham.
28. Sel. "Ku" The coins I have seen with this Bengali letter are also in perfect condition, and I assume that this coin was struck by Kula Chandra (1890-1). This is the only example of the initial letter of the Raja's name being chosen.

1.

नेमिगोप्या
दपिनपा
सुरप्रिया
सुरप्रिया

 ~

श्रीशारव
धीनरखव
दगसव
दगदु

2.

श्रीश्रीगौर
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान
नपाशान

 ~

श्रीशारव
धीनरखव
दगदुसवन
दगदुशान

3.

श्रीश्रीगौर
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान

 ~

श्रीशारव
धीनरखव
दगदुसवन

4.

श्रीश्रीगौर
सिद्धमानुष

 ~

श्रीनिपु
रघुवर्तमान

5.

श्रीश्रीगौरः
श्रीशारवमन्त्र
रघुवर्तमान
नपाशान

 ~

श्रीशारवमन्त्र
धीनरखवः
दगदुसवन
दगदुशान

6.

श्रीश्रीगौरः
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान

 ~

श्रीशारवमन्त्र
धीनरखवः
दगदुसवन

7.

श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान
श्रीश्रीगौरमि

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श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान
श्रीश्रीगौरमि

8.

श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष

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श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष

9.

श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान
श्रीश्रीगौरमि

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श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान
श्रीश्रीगौरमि

10.

श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान
श्रीश्रीगौरमि

 ~

श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान
श्रीश्रीगौरमि

11.

श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान

 ~

श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान

12.

श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान

 ~

श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान

13.

श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान

 ~

श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान

14.

श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान
श्रीश्रीगौरमि

 ~

श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान
श्रीश्रीगौरमि

15.

श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान

 ~

श्रीश्रीगौरमि
सिद्धमानुष
रघुवर्तमान

16. श्री 17. श्री 18. श्री 19. श्री
 20. श्री 21. श्री 22. श्री 23. श्री 24. श्री 25. श्री
 26. श्री 27. श्री 28. श्री