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Ancient History of Manipur

Prehistoric Period

Manipur, located in the northeastern part of India, has a rich and intriguing prehistoric heritage. The region's prehistoric period is characterized by evidence of early human settlements, remarkable archaeological findings, and the presence of stone tools and megalithic culture. These elements together provide insights into the lives of early humans in this lush, mountainous terrain.

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1. Early Human Settlements in Manipur

Geographical Context

Manipur's varied terrain, ranging from hills to plains, offered diverse habitats for early humans. The region's dense forests, rich flora and fauna, and abundant water resources made it a favorable location for human habitation.

Early Habitation Evidence

The earliest evidence of human settlements in Manipur can be traced back to the Paleolithic period. Early humans likely utilized caves and rock shelters for protection from the elements and predators. Although direct evidence of Paleolithic cave dwellings is limited, similarities with neighboring regions like Nagaland and Mizoram suggest similar patterns of habitation.

Neolithic Period

During the Neolithic era, evidence of settled agriculture began to emerge. Early humans in Manipur likely cultivated crops such as rice, which is still a staple food in the region. The fertile plains and valley regions were particularly conducive to farming, while the hilly terrains were utilized for hunting and gathering.

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2. Archaeological Findings in Manipur

Tharon Cave

The Tharon Cave in Tamenglong district is a significant archaeological site. Excavations have revealed tools and artifacts, indicating human occupation during the Neolithic period. The stratified layers of the cave suggest prolonged habitation and cultural evolution over time.

Khangkhui Cave

Located in Ukhrul district, Khangkhui Cave is another important archaeological site. Findings from the cave include pottery shards, animal bones, and rudimentary tools, hinting at the early lifestyle of the inhabitants. These caves likely served as temporary shelters and ritual sites.

Napachik Site

Situated in the Imphal valley, the Napachik site has yielded numerous Neolithic tools, including polished axes, chisels, and scrapers. This site underscores the transition from a nomadic lifestyle to a more settled and tool-dependent way of life.

Sekta Archaeological Living Museum

This museum preserves the excavation site of a megalithic burial mound in the Sekta region. The findings include pottery, iron implements, and beads, offering a glimpse into the burial practices and material culture of ancient Manipur.

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3. Stone Tools and Megalithic Culture

Stone Tools

- **Paleolithic Tools**: Simple stone implements like hand axes, cleavers, and scrapers were likely used by early inhabitants for hunting and processing food. These tools were made from locally available quartzite and other hard stones.
- **Neolithic Tools**: The Neolithic period saw the emergence of polished stone tools, marking a significant technological advancement. Tools such as adzes, axes, and chisels were used for agriculture, construction, and other daily activities.

Megalithic Culture

The megalithic culture in Manipur is particularly significant and aligns with similar practices in other parts of India. This culture is characterized by the erection of large stone structures, which served various social and ritual purposes.

1. **Menhirs**: Tall, upright stones often associated with ancestral worship or memorials.
2. **Dolmens**: Stone slabs arranged to form chambers, likely used for burial practices.
3. **Stone Circles**: Circular arrangements of stones, possibly marking ceremonial or communal spaces.

Ritualistic Significance

The megalithic culture reflects a sophisticated understanding of spirituality and societal organization. Burial mounds, discovered in regions like Sekta, provide evidence of complex rituals, including offerings of pottery, tools, and ornaments to the deceased.

Cultural and Anthropological Insights

Transition from Hunting to Farming

The archaeological record demonstrates a gradual shift from hunting and gathering to settled agriculture. This transition was facilitated by the region's fertile plains and favorable climate, which supported the cultivation of crops and domestication of animals.

Interaction with Neighboring Cultures

Manipur's prehistoric culture exhibits influences from neighboring regions, including Myanmar and Southeast Asia. The migration of tribes and the exchange of goods and ideas likely contributed to the cultural evolution of the area.

Legacy of Prehistoric Practices

Many modern-day tribal communities in Manipur retain cultural elements reminiscent of their prehistoric ancestors. Ritualistic practices, folklore, and traditional craftsmanship often reflect ancient traditions.

Mythological Origins

Manipur, a state nestled in the northeastern corner of India, is a land steeped in rich mythology and folklore. The indigenous Meitei people, who form the majority of the population, have a unique and fascinating belief system that has shaped their cultural identity for centuries. This article delves into the mythological origins of Manipur, exploring its creation myths and the roles of Sanamahi and other prominent deities.

Mythological Origins

The Meitei people believe that their land was created by divine beings. According to the ancient text **Leishemlon**, the universe began as a vast, empty expanse known as **"Khongchat"**. Within this void emerged **"Apokpa"**, the first manifestation of the Supreme Being. Apokpa then created **"Leimarel Sidabi"**, the Divine Mother, and together they gave birth to a multitude of gods and goddesses.

One of the most significant creation myths involves the deity **"Atiya Sidaba"**, also known as **"Sanamahi"**. He is considered the creator of the earth and the father of humanity. Legend has it that Sanamahi descended from the heavens and molded the earth from the primordial waters, shaping it into the land we know today as Manipur.

Creation Myths and Legends

The Meitei creation myths are not limited to the formation of the earth. They also explain the origins of various natural phenomena, human civilization, and the reasons behind many