

A study on the Hindu Brahmanical Literary works of Manipur in the 18th and 19th Century A.D.

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ABSTRACT:

The Bhakti Movement originated in Bengal by the 16th Century A.D. after the birth of Lord Chaitanya. When the movement reached in Manipur from Bangal, the easternmost State in North –East India, it took about 150 years, i.e., during the latter half of the 17th Century. The advent of Hinduism in the State, made a strong impact on the literary and cultural aspects of Manipur. The period from 1709 to 1819 was the time when great ideas began entering in Manipur and thus, the traditional concept of Manipuri Literature began identifying itself with the mainstream of Indian literature. A number of literary works based on the Hindu Brahmanical literature were made by the writers and scholars under the royal patronage during the 18th and 19th Centuries.

Key words: Bhakti Movement, Lord Chaitanya, Hinduism, mainstream, scholars, patronage

Introduction:

With the advent of the Bhakti Movement in Manipur by the latter half of the 17th Century, Hinduism acted as the prime mover in the growth and development of Medieval Manipuri Literature. After King Garibniwaz (1759-1798), Gaudiya Vaishnavism of Bengal became the Creed of the Manipuri Hindus during the reign of King Bhagyachandra (1759-1798), who was a dedicated worshipper of Lord Krishna. Manipur, during his reign reached artistic perfection in the fields of art, culture, architecture, etc. such developments are clearly reflected in the literary works of the same period.

Discussion:

As there was the influence of Bengali and Sanskrit languages in the literary works of the eighteenth century Manipur the then scholars who were well versed in these Indo-Aryan languages used to translate a number of literary works associated with Hindu Brahmanical literatures like Vedic rituals, stories and epics. Angom Gopi, Madhavram Wahengba, Gopiram Wangkhei Pandit, Laishram Aroi, Yumnam Atibar, Mayengbam

Vrindaban, Nunggangbam Govindaram, Labanga Konthoujamba, Nabananda Yubaraj and Shridam Keishamcha were the important writers of the eighteenth century. King Garibniwaz ordered Kshema Singh to compose the Ramayana in Manipuri. In carrying out this assignment Kshema Singh engaged five scholars who were well-versed in Bengali namely Premananda Nongyai Khumanthem, Mukundaram Khoisnam, Lakhmi Naraya Soiba, Ramcharan Nongthomba, Lakhmi Narayan Saikhuba. (Manihar:1996:112) Seven cantos, viz Adi, Ayodhya, Aranya, Kiskindhya Sundara, Lanka and Uttara Kandas of the Ramayana were adapted in Manipuri from the original text of Krittivasa (Jhaljit:1965:69). The work was not a translation but transcreation almost rivalling the original composition. But out of the seven cantos of the Ramayana, two cantos Adi Kanda and Ayodhya Kanda have been lost. According to R.K. Jhalajit, the books had probably been lost due to the Burmese invasion of Manipur. (Jhalajit:1977:7)

Another important work of the 18th century is Virabahu Tuba (Fall of Virabahu), an episode in the *Ramayana* of which Angom Gopi and Murari were the joint composers. On the 22nd day of *Shajiphu* (Chaitra Baisakh), saka, 1635 (1713 A.D.), the composition of the same was begun. (Manihar:op:cit:131) Virabahu, one of the sons of Ravana, offered himself to fight with Rama at a time when most of the valorous relatives of Ravana lost their lives at the hands of Rama. Virabahu achieved wonderful success because of his various qualities of head and heart. Nevertheless, he was finally defeated by Rama as the latter, on the advice of Bibhishana, the younger brother of Ravana untied the knots of Virabahu's shirt, a gift of Lord Shiva that made him invincible. On his request, Rama appeared before him as Narayana and severed his head with his powerful *Sudarshan Chakra*. His nature of being a devoted Vaishnava and deep devotion to Lord Rama were revealed as his severed head came rolling to Rama. Rama suddenly felt ruefulness for such a devotee. (Jhaljit:op:cit:82-83)

Another notable work is Meiteilon aribagi Ramayan (Ram nongaba) (Rama's Heavenly Ascension) which is a remarkable work by Lavanga Konthoujamba written in the reign of Rajarshi Bhagyachandra (Joy Singh, 1763-1798 A.D.). The story goes as follows:

After the interment of Sita alive in the bowels of the earth, Rama expressed his desire to return to heaven. In the meantime, the gods in the heaven sent Kalpurush (Time) to call back Rama to heaven from the earth. Kalpurush, in the guise of an ascetic arrived at the gate of Rama's palace and the gatekeepers brought him to Rama. Kal told Rama that he aspired to deliver a message to Rama in seclusion on the condition that anyone who interrupted their secrecy should receive the punishment of death. While Lakshmana, under the wish of Rama, was keeping vigil at the gate the scrawny and hungry Brahmin Durvasha arrived there and asked for a hearty meal in front of Rama. In spite of Lakshmana's humble request to take the meal first and to see Rama later, the Brahmin vehemently refused his proposal and threatened to reduce the country to ashes

by using his supernatural power of curse. Finding no other way out, Lakshmana approached Rama with Durvasa. At the very instant, Kaal (god which represents time) disappeared. Lakshmana, for the violation of the condition, sacrificed his life by jumping into the river Sarayu. Soon after the incident, Rama along with his other two brothers, Bharata and Satrugana ended their earthly existence by following Lakshmana's example. (Sanahal: 1970:33)

The adaptation of the seven cantos of the Ramayana is a great contribution to Manipuri literature. Not only the Ramayana, some parts of the Mahabharata were also written in Manipuri during the reign of King Garibniwaz as a result of his first initiation into Vaishnava faith by Guru Gopal Das. King Garibniwaz as a devout Bhakta, rewrote the story of Parikshit, the divine king in Manipuri which was composed earlier in Bengali by the Saint poet, Gangadas Sen. The book was written in 1725 A.D. (Manihar:op:cit:135)

Parikshit was the posthumous son of Abhimanyu, son of the Pandava hero, Arjuna. It narrated the story of Parikshit who became the king of Hastina after the renunciation of Yudhisthira with his brothers and Draupadi. The story goes to tell as to how King Parikshit met Kali and was cursed by the son of Sage Srunga as he had humiliated the sage by throwing a dead snake around the latter's neck. He died from the bite of a Takshak (the snake king). (ibid:136) The book also told how Janmejy, son of Parikshit, performed a Yagna (a snake sacrifice) for the destruction of the snakes to avenge the death of his father.

In Parikshit, King Garibniwaz clearly mentioned the purpose for writing the book. He said that this book was written to enable all his subjects to get salvation. (Jhaljit:1998:30)

Another work from the great epic Mahabharata is Virat Santhuplon (Virat Parva), Navanananda, the crown prince and son of King Jai Singh translated orally this portion from the Virata parva from the story of the Mahabharata composed by Ramkrishna Das. Virat Santhuplon was the story of five Pandava brothers and their spouse Draupadi how they made a plan to live in disguise in Matsyadesha, Kingdom of Virata for one year at the end of their fourteen years exile in the forest. They lived there under the protection of Virata king by assuming different names. During this period, Bhima killed Kichak, the king's brother-in-law who tried to molest Draupadi. Susama, as soon as he received the news of the death of Kichak, proceeded with a large army into Virata to plunder cattle but they were defeated by Uttara, the crown prince of Virata with the help of Vrihnala who was none other than Arjuna. Finally, the Pandava brothers and Draupadi revealed their identity and with the advice of Lord Krishna they decided to send an envoy to Duryodhana to demand their kingdom of Hastina back. (Nilamani:1999:85)

The adaptation of Virata parva in the reign of Jai Singh was the first serious attempt to adapt to complete parva of the Mahabharata.(Jhaljit:1998:96) Wahengbam Madhavram and Mayengbam Brindavan modified the story from the oral translation of Navanananda Yubaraj and they started writing it on Monday, *Shri Panchami* , 1781 AD (Nilamani:op:cit:Lairik Lengbagi Wahoudok)

Langoi Sagol Thaba was another translation work from Gangadas Sen's Ashwamedha Parva which was formerly written in Bengali. It was translated originally by Ghanashyam Thokchom and was improved later on by Longjam Parshuram with the help of a few assistants from the Pena loishang (department of musicians of the royal palace). The present Langoi Sagol Thaba is the final outcome of the intricate improvements and developments at the hands of the Longjam Chandrashyam who was the son of Longjam Parshuram and Konienbam Dayaram was another helper. This work began on Monday, the 13th day of Hiyanggei(October-November). Saka 1724 (1802 A.D.). (Manihar:op:cit:140) The story was a vivid description of performing Aswamedha sacrifice by the Pandavas in which horses were let loose throughout the country when the famous battle of Kurukshetra was over.

Other notable works of the medieval period based on Hindu Brahmanical religion were Charairongba Khungum (1741), Lakshmi Charit, (1735), Rupaban, Dhrubacharit, Bir Singh Panchali, Ekadashi Panchali, etc.

Conclusion: With the advent of Hinduism in the early part of the 18th Century, the new faith made tremendous impact on social and cultural life of the Manipuris. This new phenomenon was well manifested in Manipuri literature and the traditional concept of Manipur literature began identifying itself with the mainstream of India literature. Consequently, grafting of Sanskrit and Bengali words began to appear in Manipuri language and literature. The then writers and scholars who were well versed in these Indo-Aryan languages used to translate a number of literatures like vedic rituals, stories and epics. Eventually, some cantos of the Ramayana, were adapted in Manipuri from the original text of Krittivasha. The main literary works of the 18th and 19th centuries were Virabahu Tuba (Rama's Heavenly Ascension), Virat Santhuplon (Virat Parva), Langgoi Sagol Thaba, Charairongba Khungum, Lakshmi Charit, Rupaban, Dhrubacharit, Bir Singh Panchali, Ekadashi Pangchali etc. Thus, the changing aspects of society and culture were cast back in the theme, subject and stories, etc. of the literary works.

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